SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL CLARIFICATION

By

ERIC C. SHEFFIELD

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2003
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study, in the jargon of public school teachers, has been a “group project.” Some who have contributed to the project did so as I began researching and writing; others, however, have been involved for a much longer time. Among those who joined the project very early on were my parents. My mother gave me the drive and organization skills that are necessary to complete a project of this magnitude--skills that, as my father often quips, are “from the German side of the family.” She also reminded me, especially at various dark hours of my life, that everything happens for a reason. My father instilled in me a love of language and reason that ultimately led to my study of philosophy and, at the same time, extolled me to “follow my heart.” Had I not followed my heart or been driven to succeed, I never would have completed this project.

Sheer drive and love of learning, however, are useful only when good teachers and a clear philosophical perspective direct them in action. I have been lucky. Robert Wright, Rodman Webb, and Arthur Newman have inspired and guided me as I have worked through the many pitfalls of graduate study and research. Robert Sherman, the most important philosophical influence on this project, introduced me to pragmatism and then devoted many hours of his retirement to edit the numerous drafts of this study. His perspective, experience, editing skills, and time have brought this research to fruition.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the most important group in this project, my immediate family. Our sons, Ezra and Stefan, have been patient and supportive while Dad has “worked all weekend” for the last several years--years that can never be gotten
back. My wife, Dana, has been an inspiring partner on this as she has been on all of our family “projects” throughout the years. She consoled me when the work was tough, cheered me as the work progressed, and pushed me when I got complacent. She will continue to be the inspiration for any future “group projects.”
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. ii

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER

1 PHILOSOPHICAL CLARITY IN SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION .................. 1
   Background ............................................................................................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem ..................................................................................... 2
   The Purpose and Significance of the Study .......................................................... 7
   Related Literature ................................................................................................ 8
   Methodology .......................................................................................................... 11
   Organization .......................................................................................................... 12

2 THE CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF SERVICE-LEARNING ................................. 16
   Community Service, Public Education and American Character ....................... 18
   The Service-learning Concept Outgrows Itself ..................................................... 36
   Historical Consequences For Practice: Looking Back to the Future ................... 39

3 THE MEANING OF SERVICE IN SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION .............. 41
   Hegemonic Notions of the American Service Ethic ............................................. 43
   Mutuality as Community Service ........................................................................ 50
   Howard Radest: A Complete Act of Service ...................................................... 53
   Consequences for Practice .................................................................................... 61

4 EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING ............................. 67
   Traditional Notions of Learning and Knowledge ............................................... 69
   The Progressive Revolution: A Foundation for Service-Learning ...................... 71
   Consequences for Practice .................................................................................... 85
5 REFLECTION: THE TIE THAT BINDS EDUCATION AND SERVICE ..................89

The Relationship Between Service, Academics, and Reflection .................. 92
Reflection: A Continual Component of a Service-Learning Projects ............. 102
Consequences for Practice ........................................................................ 111

6 THE AIMS OF SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION ..................................115

Service-learning Aims: a Survey of the Research ..................................... 117
Philosophical Foundations For Service-Learning Aims ............................ 124
Consequences for Practice ........................................................................ 138

7 SERVICE-LEARNING AS DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION ..............................140

The Need for a Democratic Theory of Education .................................... 143
The General Characteristics of a Democratic Theory of Education ............ 145
Service-Learning As a Democratic Educational Reform ............................ 151
A Critique of Service-Learning Practice .................................................. 156
Suggestions for Service-Learning Research ............................................. 164
Concluding Remarks ............................................................................... 166

LIST OF REFERENCES ................................................................................167

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .........................................................................177
A constant desire of the American public is the reform and improvement of educational practice. Service-learning is one such reform that recently has caught the attention of educators, politicians, and the general public. Its advocates suggest it as a way to make public education more responsive to the needs of students and as a way to strengthen democratic institutional and participatory practice. It is also, however, in need of conceptual clarification. Until service-learning is understood at its most basic, foundational level, it may well travel the path that other reforms have and never reach its full potential. The purpose of this study is to clarify the service-learning concept so that its practice will be successful.

As a study that provides conceptual clarity, it is necessarily philosophical in method. This philosophical analysis relies heavily on the work of both progressive philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as contemporary service-learning scholars to provide the foundational guidance needed to understand service-learning and, therefore, its practice as a democratic, educational reform.
The author first traces the conceptual history of service-learning, tying it to the thought of progressive philosophers such as John Dewey, William James, William Kilpatrick, and Paul Hanna. He then brings the service-learning idea through the twentieth century and in doing so indicates when and how the current conceptual confusion has developed. The subsequent chapters attempt to clarify those concepts that drive service-learning practice. Those concepts are service, experiential education, and reflection.

The conceptual framework developed from the analysis of each of these notions then is used to determine the appropriate aims of service-learning education. Finally, service-learning is “placed” in the context of democratic educational practice as a way to determine its viability as an educational reform and to suggest further research endeavors that might test the conceptual understanding embraced by this study. Ultimately, this project provides a foundation upon which future service-learning practice can be based and current service-learning practice can be constructively critiqued.
CHAPTER 1
PHILOSOPHICAL CLARITY IN SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION

Background

By signing the National and Community Service Trust Act (P.L. 103-82) into law in September 1993, President Bill Clinton (with the support of Congress) gave political, legal, and financial life to the educational reform movement known as service-learning.¹ P.L. 103-82 not only created a source of funding for service-learning but also promised federal support in the form of training, materials development, and research. Though the idea of service-learning has been around in various forms for some time, it was P.L. 103-82 that gave viability to the idea of service-learning. Service-learning continues to be one of the most discussed educational reform movements of recent years. This interest is driven by federal funding in the form of grant monies to local school districts and by the potential it has for fixing many current educational problems.

Service-learning is an educational reform plan that its proponents contend has numerous benefits, including increased academic understanding, citizenship and character development, community transformation, and a more intense student engagement than that found in traditional approaches to education.² Service-learning begins with a “felt” community problem. Through reflection, academic and democratic

¹ P.L. 103-82 is the successor to the 1990 National and Community Service Act (P.L. 101-610). It expanded the 1990 act to specify and separate funding streams and to emphasize service-learning.

solutions are considered and then “applied” to the problem in the form of community service. Reflection, the core component, provides the connection between what is learned in the classroom and the application of that learning to the particular community problem. The service activity links server and served in the common democratic goal of solving a commonly felt community problem. That connection creates a deeper understanding of scholarship and citizenship, and removes barriers among community “strangers.” Service-learning education, understood correctly, holds great hope as a transformative, democratic method of teaching and learning. However, that potential will be realized only when service-learning practice is founded on sound conceptual thinking.

Statement of the Problem

Americans are notorious for paradoxically seeing their institutions as the best in the world and, at the same time, as inadequate.³ Public K-12 education is no exception. In fact, K-12 education is a regular target for criticism when a national problem arises, regardless of the nature of that problem. This perception is not surprising because historically Americans have conceptualized public education as a panacea for fixing any political or economic disturbance.⁴ Public K-12 education today is viewed in much the same way as it has been throughout its history. It remains the essential institution for creating and maintaining a successful democracy. As such, the American public continues its demand that public education be reformed to meet the changing needs of a rapidly changing society.


⁴ A discussion of this American view of education can be found in Henry J.
Political and educational movements in response to these demands are wide in both scope and potential. In Florida, Governor Jeb Bush and his cabinet have developed new initiatives that base individual school funding on student achievement as measured by a statewide, standardized test. Vermont has tried, somewhat successfully, to innovate its educational funding process in an attempt to fix past inequalities. Minnesota, Ohio, and Florida have embraced systems that provide public funding to private schools—systems supported by a recent Supreme Court ruling. These are only a few of the new reform plans touted with, seemingly, each local and national election. Depending on how educational reforms fare in the courts and election year politics, the traditional means and aims of public education might well be changed forever.

Rising from current education reform proposals is what has been called “the sleeping giant of educational reform.” That sleeping giant is service-learning. Service-learning is an educational model that is Deweyan in character and grows in part out of the American progressive tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in part from contemporary service-learning “pioneers.” This educational approach has the

---

5 The Vermont fiscal reforms are well documented in David Goodman, “America’s Newest Class War,” Mother Jones (September/October 1999): 39-42.

6 Zelman, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Ohio, et al. V. Simmons-Harris et al. No. 00-1751 (Supreme Court of the United States of America).


potential to alleviate student alienation, improve academic skills, solve community
problems, and increase students’ civic participation. It might even quiet student and
critic voices that accurately describe traditional schoolwork as boring, abstract and
unrelated to “real world” problems. It is also, however, a reform movement that is
outgrowing its own conceptual framework.

Educational scholars generally agree that the early success of the service-learning
movement (pre-P.L. 103-82) has given way to growing confusion about what service-
learning is and how it should be practiced. As Richard Kraft has pointed out, “One of the
major difficulties in evaluating or researching service-learning programs is the lack of
agreement on what is meant by the term service learning and exactly what it is meant to
accomplish.”9 Rahima Wade writes in her book Community Service Learning: “While
many educators may be convinced of the value of service–learning through their contacts
with student and community, a healthy dose of critical reflection and analysis is essential
to producing and sustaining quality programs.”10 She goes on to say that service-learning
practitioners “engage more in cheerleading for their programs than in introspecting about
their shortcomings.”11 Dwight Giles and Janet Eyler maintain that service–learning

---

9 Richard Kraft, “Service Learning: An Introduction to its Theory, Practice, and
Effects,” Advances In Education Research 3 (Fall 1998): 17.

10 Rahima Wade, Community Service Learning (New York: State University of
New York Press, 1997), 301.

11 Ibid.
“lacks a well articulated conceptual framework.”

They cite three reasons that the service-learning movement has not become a formal field of study:

Part of the transition from a movement to a field involves the challenge of developing a clearly defined and commonly shared body of knowledge. It is our observation that this process has occurred slowly in service-learning for at least three reasons. Perhaps the foremost reason is that the practitioners of service-learning are more oriented to action than scholarly pursuits, and thus their writings have tended to be focused more on processes and program descriptions. Secondly, service-learning, at least until very recently, has been quite marginal to the academic enterprise, and thus educational theorists outside of service-learning have ignored it as a potential area of conceptual as well as empirical inquiry. Finally, it seems that there is a general resistance to theorizing in service-learning.

Goodwin Liu, in his foreword to a brief history of service-learning, sees the following as fundamental, unanswered questions about service-learning:

What theory of knowledge can account for the pedagogical role of community service? Should we aim to assimilate service-learning into the norms of the traditional academy, or should we advocate it as a critique of those basic norms?

What does it mean to enlist the community as a true partner in education? Is it possible to build a national movement without unduly compromising local autonomy and self-determination?

Richard Battistoni expresses his concern for the very survival of service-learning education. He writes, “We are at a point in the life of the current service-learning movement . . . when our practice is outstripping our understanding of what constitutes good practice.”

---

12 Giles and Eyler, “The Theoretical Roots,” 77.

13 Ibid.


15 Richard Battistoni, foreword to To Serve and Learn: The Spirit of Community Education
There are two crucial and related points that must be understood concerning service-learning and philosophical understanding: first of all, attempts to trace service-learning to one philosophical tradition or another do not answer the more important conceptual question, “What is service-learning education?” That is, service-learning must be understood at its basic, foundational level before it can be practiced successfully, and the tradition-tracing work that has been done thus far does not provide that grounding.

Secondly, there has been very little theoretical work done on the conceptual nature of service-learning education aside from the tracing of its philosophical origins. The type of philosophical work found in these studies, though interesting, does not address important conceptual questions such as those posed above. The question this study attempts to answer is not which political or philosophical camp can claim service-learning. Nor is it about what broader political goals service-learning promote. The present question is the prior, more crucial, philosophical question: “How must service-learning be conceptualized if its practice is to meet the potential that it holds?” Until service-learning is understood conceptually, its practice will suffer because educators will lack the philosophical understanding that is necessary to direct service-learning projects, to evaluate those projects, and to do further needed research—all of which are essential to the survival of the service-learning reform.

The problem this study attacks, then, is the conceptual muddiness that exists at the most basic, foundational level of the service-learning approach to K-12 education. This truly is a “felt problem” in the Deweyan sense of the word. Service-learning advocates

---

continue to struggle with practical questions that result from not clearly understanding its underlying ideas. The lack of conceptual clarity not only confuses the implementation of service-learning; it retards the evaluation process and stagnates needed research efforts, as well. Until service-learning is understood at its most basic conceptual level, its practice and promotion will remain problematic.

The Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to bring conceptual clarity to the service-learning reform endeavor in public, K-12 education. This research involves asking and answering the difficult question, “What do--and should--educators mean by service-learning?” To answer this question, this study will analyze the concepts that foundationally support service-learning education. Because these are issues of conceptual clarity, this study will utilize a philosophical research method. The significance of this study is clear: without philosophical research into what is meant by service-learning, its potential to transform American public education will never materialize. Once service-learning is clearly understood, it may well revolutionize public education and help solve those educational problems about which politicians and the public talk. This project will open possibilities and improve practice by bringing philosophical focus to the practice of service-learning education.

Implicated in the conceptual clarification of service-learning are two related purposes. Firstly, for service-learning to fulfill its potential, research of all kinds must be done. Important quantitative and qualitative research is needed to evaluate and redirect current practice. However, such research will be worthwhile only when based upon a clear understanding of service-learning. As William James argued, only after a sound,
conceptual analysis of any endeavor is done, can philosophical vision be directive for further research. Without definitive foundational guidance, service-learning research, both qualitative and quantitative, cannot be carried out and used in a quality manner. Until that conceptual guidance is available for directing researchers to the important questions, research results will continue to be misguided and possibly antithetical to its successful implementation. Service-learning can remain a viable public education reform only insofar as it is supported by equally viable conceptual research.

Secondly, public school teachers and administrators need conceptual clarity to both direct and defend service-learning efforts. In terms of direction, it is crucial that practitioners understand the “why” of service-learning in order to successfully undertake the “how” of service-learning. Without a basis for making choices in practice, uninformed and potentially harmful decisions may result. As to defending service-learning practice, educators must be able to explain to the public and its political representatives why service-learning education makes sense if it is to win their approval and the funding that comes with that approval. Institutional change can be excruciatingly slow and painful. Change in public education is no exception. This study will be significant as well, therefore, in providing a rationale for establishing the service-learning reform movement in public K-12 schools.

Related Literature

The claim made here, about the conceptual “muddiness” within service-learning, is not to say that there have not been good attempts to construct conceptual

frameworks around service-learning. One such example is Robert A. Rhoads’
Community Service and Higher Learning. Rhoads advocates service-learning as a
reasonable method of encouraging an “ethic of care.” He bases his argument on George
Herbert Mead’s ideas of self, “the other,” play, and games, and on feminist social
critique from Carol Gilligan and others.\textsuperscript{17} His discussion is clear and convincing;
however, it is an argument that can come only after a complete analysis of the service-
learning concept is done. Service-learning might very well add to the development of an
ethic of care in both individual students and democratic American society. It is, however,
impossible to say until it is clear what is meant by service-learning education.

Another example of building broader systems around service-learning can be
found in C. David Lisman’s Toward a Civil Society. Lisman grounds service-learning
conceptually, that is philosophically, in the tradition of “strong democracy.” After
clearly explaining differing conceptions of strong and weak democracy, Lisman “places”
service-learning in a scheme where it plays a vital role in the concept and practice of
strong democracy as advocated by Benjamin Barber, and in the commonwealth tradition
suggested in the work of Harry Boyte.\textsuperscript{18} However, as in the case of the Rhoads book,

\textsuperscript{17} Robert Rhoads, Community Service and Higher Learning: Explorations of the
Caring Self (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997); George Herbert
Meade, Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (Chicago, Ill:
The University of Chicago press, 1934); Carole Gilligan, In a Different Voice:
Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University
Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{18} C. David Lisman, Toward a Civil Society (Westport, CT: Greenwood
Publishing, 1980); Benjamin R. Barber, Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a
New Age (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1984); Harry C. Boyte,
Lisman’s discussion of service-learning is not much help until a clear conception of what constitutes service-learning is available for discussion.

Other literature and research projects related to service-learning are easy to find. There are journals whose sole purpose is to provide research results to service-learning practitioners. It is, on the other hand, difficult to find published research that examines service-learning from a truly philosophical point of view. There are countless character studies, attitude studies, case studies, quantitative studies, surveys, and even ethnographic-like studies, but little in the way of philosophy. The few doctoral dissertations that purport to deal with service-learning philosophically do so in a manner similar to what Rhoads and Lisman do in the work cited above. That is, they attempt to show how service-learning fits into a particular philosophical tradition or political practice. It is another case of getting the cart before the horse in educational practice and begs the question, “How can useful research be carried out on an educational approach that does not have a clear conceptual framework?”

There have been several brief articles that have begun the philosophical work needed to clarify the service-learning pedagogy. Most of these have attempted to point out connections between the work of John Dewey and service-learning theory. Julie Hatcher has done some groundwork in tracing the Deweyan roots of service-learning in an article that appeared in the Fall 1997 edition of the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning.

19 For example, The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning.


21For example, Lori Varlotti, “Service-Learning As Community: A Critique of Current Conceptualizations and a Charge to Chart a New Direction” (Ph.D diss., University of Minnesota, 1997).
Dwight Giles and Janet Eyler also have discussed Dewey’s influence in their article, “The Theoretical Roots of Service-Learning in John Dewey: Toward a Theory of Service-Learning,” in the Fall 1994 issue of the same publication. Though Giles and Eyler briefly discuss the theoretical basis for the service-learning movement, their central argument is that these theoretical issues lack complete understanding. Seth Pollock has written an interesting book, Three Decades of Service-Learning in Higher Education (1966-1996), that traces the recent history of service-learning as an institutional movement and provides some insight into the conceptual evolution of the movement. However, it is a history, not a philosophical discussion. The scant amount of philosophical work found in the service-learning literature means that it is research that yet needs to be done.

Methodology

William James described philosophy as being “prospective,” or visionary. Indeed it is, for without conceptual clarity neither the means nor the aims of any endeavor will be sufficiently understood. John Dewey says about philosophical research,

> When it is acknowledged that under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions, that it has sprung from a clash of social ends and from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies, it will be seen

---


23 Giles and Eyler, “The Theoretical Roots.”


25 James, Pragmatism, 53.
that the task of future philosophy is to clarify men’s ideas as to the social and moral strife of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts. That which may be pretentiously unreal when it is formulated in metaphysical distinctions becomes intensely significant when connected with the drama of the struggle of social beliefs and ideals. That is, philosophical problems come out of real conflict between real people at a conceptual, or “visionary,” level. It is the goal of philosophical research to provide guidance out of confusion that is derived from conceptual fogginess and thereby provide a clear path to solve problems felt in practice.

Philosophical research might most clearly be understood as “the criticism, clarification, and analysis of the language, concepts, and logic of the ends and means of human experience.” That is, philosophical research has the goal of clearly explaining the conceptual basis for social practice. Without such an explanation, neither the means nor the aims of that practice can be clearly understood. The particular social practice that is the focus of this study is the service-learning educational reform plan. The problem dealt with here is precisely one that is philosophical in nature; that is, until the confusion over what constitutes service-learning is made clear conceptually, practice, both in terms of the “in-the-trenches” use of service-learning and of research goal-setting and political promotion cannot move in a positive direction and will outstrip itself.

**Organization**

Having given due justification for the study in the present chapter, Chapter 2 briefly describes the history and evolution of service-learning as an educational concept.

---


This historical overview will show how the conceptual muddiness has developed as the service-learning movement has grown both in conceptual complexity and in practice. This necessarily abridged historical story is based on the few texts that deal specifically with service-learning’s history and additionally examines the work of philosophers from which essential service-learning concepts have evolved. The work of these philosophers is crucial to understanding where service-learning has been and how it should be further developed.

Subsequent chapters are organized around the different conceptual terms of the service-learning model of education. The idea of service is taken up in Chapter 3. Service, on the face, seems a simple matter. However, in considering service as a component of a public school reform, the issue becomes more complicated, particularly in relation to concepts such as mutuality, “strangers,” solidarity, diversity, and democratic connection. The service concept as it works in serve-learning is muddied further by traditional American notions of service, such as charity and philanthropy, that confuse rather than clarify its meaning. A clear understanding of the service concept in service-learning is necessary to its successful practice. In the end, this study advocates and fleshes out a concept of service recommended by Howard Radest as the most useful for successful service-learning practice.\(^\text{28}\)

Chapter 4 explores the learning theory that service-learning practice embraces. Learning in service-learning is clearly experiential in nature. However, what is meant by “experiential” in the context of service-learning is not completely clear and is explained

\(^{28}\) Howard Radest, Community Service: Encounter with Strangers (Westport, Ct.: Praeger, 1993).
here. John Dewey often is described as the father of experiential education; he is relied on heavily in clarifying experiential educational theory. Other progressive educators, in particular William H. Kilpatrick and Paul Hanna, complete the Deweyan concept of experience as it relates to service-learning. The work of David Kolb, a more recent and much heralded experiential theorist, is examined as well to see what, if any, contribution it makes to service-learning theory.

The most essential component of service-learning education is reflection. Unfortunately, as will be made clear, it often is the most confused or ignored in practice. Reflection, as it is explained in Chapter 5 of this study, connects the experience of the service project to academic, classroom learning. Chapter 5 clarifies what reflection is and how reflection must be conceived as a component of service-learning practice. To complete this analysis, John Dewey’s significant work on the features of reflection is called upon and ultimately championed as the best notion for service-learning practice. Reflection is a component that is continuous and essential throughout each and every aspect of the service-learning philosophy. Without a clear conceptual understanding of reflection, successful practice is simply impossible.

Chapter 6 elaborates and evaluates the specific aims of service-learning education. As John Dewey argued, educational aims are necessary to successfully guide educational practice and must be understood as a dynamic part of the means used to achieve those ends.\(^{29}\) That is, educational aims cannot come from outside the educational process. Service-learning advocates claim that a variety of goals can be attained through

implementation of the service-learning model of K-12 education. These include not only traditional academic growth, but growth in democratic character dispositions and community transformation, as well. This chapter scrutinizes these general aims to see first if they are desirable and, second, if they are attainable from within the service-learning approach.

Chapter 7 completes the research loop by examining service-learning’s place within a democratic theory of education. Service-learning is characterized in Chapter 7 as a fitting democratic reform rather than as a radical turn from tradition. This summative chapter then argues that this study provides both a foundation for future service-learning endeavors as well as a critique of current practice. Finally, it suggests other areas of research that must be undertaken to further understand service-learning education. The clearing of the conceptual fog will provide important insights into this very important educational reform movement.
CHAPTER 2
THE CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Tracing an educational reform movement's conceptual evolution is an important endeavor. It is important because ignoring the history of an idea can lead to misunderstanding and unsuccessful practice, as layers of contemporary thinking get recklessly piled onto existing theory. In the case of service-learning education, this is precisely what has happened. Service-learning practice has moved beyond its conceptual grounding. Discovering historically how this conceptual muddiness has occurred is a first step toward re-clarifying the service-learning idea. It is also important to understand service-learning historically because, as John Dewey argued nearly a century ago:

The danger in a new movement is that in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively. Then it takes its clew in practice from that which is rejected instead of from the constructive development of its own philosophy.1

It is, as Dewey made clear, essential to avoid the mistakes of the past. It is equally important that historically good ideas are not jettisoned along with the bad. To have both requires historical understanding. As Albert Adams and Sherrod Reynolds write,

In examining these ancestral artifacts, some striking similarities to modern practice appear, while once prominent features seem to have been distorted or lost completely. Weaving the tapestry of past and present together is the refrain of openness to experience and change. Pausing to listen to progressive forefathers

---

engaging in this dialogue may provide experiential educators with the kind of historical perspective that helps clarify future directions.2

Historical accounts of service-learning education, however, are few and far between. Aside from a single major study that documents its successes and failures as a contemporary institutional practice, and another study informally "reflecting" on its origins, no complete history of service-learning exists.3 Though several other less ambitious discussions that trace the conceptual history of service-learning education are available, they take the form of brief synopses that invite a more complete historical understanding.4

Some advocates of service-learning trace the philosophical birth of the current movement to the early twentieth century and the progressive educational thought that John Dewey represented.5 They credit the progressives with first seeing the necessity to develop an intimate relationship between public schools and democratic communities that


might drive experiential educational practice. Though the progressives never used the phrase "service-learning," their thought has been essential to contemporary service-learning theory.

Other service-learning advocates, however, trace the movement back only as far as the 1960s and 1970s.\(^6\) The "pioneer" rebirth of progressive theory included the 1967 coining of the phrase "service-learning" and the growth of service-learning practice in public schools throughout the 1970s.\(^7\) The important point to remember is that this chapter is not written to credit either the progressives or the pioneers; rather, it is written with the understanding that both of these groups of forward-thinking educators contributed much to the theoretical underpinnings of service-learning. The hope is that from this historical analysis can be gleaned important clarifying notions from both movements, notions that will help clear the conceptual fog of present service-learning practice.

**Community Service, Public Education and American Character**

The citizens of the United States have a relatively long history of individual, voluntary, public service as part of their national character. Alexis de Tocqueville argued in 1835 that the political framework and the lack of aristocratic hierarchy demanded that individuals serve society voluntarily; otherwise, selfish individualism would destroy

---

\(^6\) Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, *A Movement’s Pioneers*.

democracy in the United States. The American notion of democratic service can be found in familiar tales of barn raisings, church construction, and caring for families fallen ill, as well as in political participation. Robert Bellah et al, in *Habits of the Heart*, note that this tension between individualism and public commitment continues to play out in the making of policy, educational and otherwise, today as it has throughout U.S. history. It is a tension that is essential to maintaining democratic institutions that are held together by a common ideology rather than by historical practice or tradition.

While communities busied themselves building the young nation, public education came to be seen as necessary to maintaining democratic life and democratic institutions. Horace Mann saw that "enlightened" participation must be encouraged and civic skills taught in public schools so that American democracy could survive. Public education blossomed as a result of Horace Mann and other forward-thinking educators. Not until the late nineteenth century, however, did these two essential democratic practices (community service and public education) come together in service-learning education.

8 Alex de Tocqueville, *Democracy In America* (New York: The New American Library, 1956 (1835)).


11 Horace Mann, *Twelfth Annual Report Covering the Year 1848* (Boston, Ma: Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers, 1849), 90.
Penn Normal School: the Birth of Service-learning Practice

The Civil War not only forcefully reunited the southern and the northern states, but also brought community, service, and education together for the first time in U.S. educational history. Out of the fiery battles of the civil war came a newly emancipated slave population that had to be educated. Ex-slaves needed democratic education to thrive economically and to participate as American citizens. Following the Civil War, African-American educational institutions such as Tuskegee and Hampton provided those necessary educational services in the American South, particularly through ex-slave education. Penn Normal School in South Carolina approached the problem of educating these new citizens by combining community service with public education: it was one of the earliest experiments with service-learning education.

Rossa B. Cooley and Grace Bigelow House established Penn Normal, Agricultural and Industrial School in St. Helena, South Carolina, in 1862. The school's mission was to educate ex-slaves so that they could deal successfully with their newly won freedom. Though Cooley and House never used the term "service-learning" when describing the activities at the Penn School, it is clear in what they did say that service and learning were intimately linked in practice. Paul Kellogg noted in his forward to School Acres: An Adventure in Rural Education, that Cooley and House found

The experience of Penn in education “of the people, by the people, for the people" not only plays luminously on the needs of rural districts the country over, but upon a dilemma confronting our cities. Miss Cooley reveals how the New England school of the "three R's" with its academic ramifications fell short when it came to training-for-life under the changing conditions of the rural South. She

---

sets forth the strategy and spirit of the two revolutions at Penn School--how the life of the farms was brought into the classrooms, and then how through the school acres and other extramural activities the process was reversed and the educational impulse was spread to the ends of the island.13

Penn Normal school clearly operated on a conceptual foundation similar to that which progressive educational philosophers would advocate: “to learn it is to live it.”14

The Penn Normal School belief that schools, as essential democratic institutions, must be conceptualized as inexorably tied to the broader community was another indication that Cooley and House practiced service-learning education. Students, citizens, and teachers attacked community problems together through projects that blurred the classroom/community line. The school became a vital part of the community, not a separate institution:

The children return to their homes each evening and connect those homes with the school with an unbroken intimacy. The mass of children in a thousand communities in the South cannot go to boarding schools. The rural teacher must be interested in the family as well as in the child and the larger community interests are as important as the classrooms.15

The Penn school philosophy also held that for a school to be a real part of the community, it must be “elastic” and start with the problem-driven interests of the students and their families.16 Student centered educational practice, an intimate interaction

13 Paul Kellogg, foreword to School Acres: An Adventure in Rural Education by Rosa Cooley and Grace House (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), xiii.


16 Ibid., 56.
between school and community, and experiential learning were all harbingers of progressive educational theory generally, and service-learning particularly.

Pragmatism: The Service-learning Philosophy is Born

The service-learning concept that drove the Penn Normal School pedagogy was put into formal philosophical talk as that institution expanded its practice. Progressive educators and philosophers of the newly developed pragmatic school of philosophy theorized that public schools in a democracy must be tools of the community and extensions of the home. Notions of education and service intertwined as a result of changes in educational philosophy that were driven by a shift in the notion of philosophy generally. In advancing William James’ pragmatism, John Dewey, William H. Kilpatrick, and Paul Hanna, in particular, talked of an educational philosophy that took student experience to be primary in educational practice. The change in educational thinking mirrored the shift in general philosophical inquiry from abstraction to lived experience.

John Dewey argued on this point that

If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education. Unless a philosophy is to remain symbolic—or verbal—or sentimental indulgence for a few, or else mere arbitrary dogma, its auditing of past experience and its program of values must take effect in conduct. Public agitation, propaganda, legislative and administrative action are effective in producing the change of disposition which a philosophy indicates as desirable, but only in the degree in which they modify mental and moral attitudes. On the other side, the business of schooling tends to become a routine empirical affair unless its aims and methods are animated by such a broad and sympathetic survey of its place in contemporary life as it is the business of philosophy to provide.\(^{17}\)

That is, public schools must be directly involved in the life of its community if they are to succeed as vital democratic institutions. Pragmatic philosophers held that good public education, like useful philosophy, must approach its aims by beginning with real life problems. Absent this, both practices (philosophy and education) degenerate to mere speculation and abstraction. The feeling and facing of real rather than artificially created community problems not only fosters reflective, critical thinking, but also encourages young citizens to actively participate in transforming their community.

**William James' Call to National Service**

Numerous educational scholars, writing about the emergence of national service generally and service-learning particularly, correctly credit William James with suggesting a transformation of military pride into peaceful, civic organized activity similar to service-learning. In his speech, “The Moral Equivalent of War,” James proposed the following:

If now—and this is my idea—there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against Nature, the injustice would tend to be evened out, and numerous other goods to the commonwealth would remain blind as the luxurious classes now are blind, to man's relations to the globe he lives on, and to the permanently sour and hard foundations of his higher life. They would have paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature; they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better fathers and teachers of the following generation.

---


William James’ community service ideas and pragmatic philosophy were the catalysts for progressive educational change. This change in philosophy generally and philosophy of education specifically, began the conceptual evolution that became service-learning.

**John Dewey’s Democratic Education**

John Dewey did not call it service-learning, but what he advocated was similar in both aim and method to what the Penn Normal school initiated near the end of the Civil War and what contemporary service-learning educators claim to do today. In 1899, Dewey delivered a series of lectures specifically for teachers. These talks contained the beginnings of a philosophy of education on which service-learning might be based.

Dewey described the kinds of approaches to education that fit the democratic experience, debunked traditional learning theory, and prescribed similar practices to those found at the Penn Normal School.

Echoing educational practice at Penn Normal School, Dewey conceived public schools as extensions of the family and important community institutions. Dewey said about this relationship that,

> If we take an example from an ideal home, where the parent is intelligent enough to recognize what is best for the child, and is able to supply what is needed, we find the child learning through the social converse and constitution of the family. There are certain points of interest and value to him in the conversation carried on: statements are made, inquiries arise, topics are discussed, and the child continually learns. He states his experiences. His misconceptions are corrected.

> Again the child participates in the household occupations, and thereby gets habits of industry, order, and regard for the rights and ideas of others, and the fundamental habit of subordinating his activities to the general interest of the household. Now, if we organize and generalize all of this, we have the ideal school. There is no mystery about it, no wonderful discovery of pedagogy or educational theory. It is simply a question of doing systematically and in a large,
intelligent, and competent way what for various reasons can be done in most households only in a comparatively meager and haphazard manner.\textsuperscript{20}

Clearly Dewey was talking about a notion of public schools that Cooley and House had already embraced in practice at Penn Normal: a democratic institution intimately connected to and driven by community problems and citizen needs.

\textbf{William Kilpatrick's Project Method}

William Kilpatrick, a student of Dewey and a follower of pragmatism, developed educational concepts that clearly support contemporary service-learning practice. In his 1922 essay, “The Project Method,” Kilpatrick discussed public education and its role in a democratic community and explained his own ideas of “purposeful acts” related to learning. Based on Dewey's philosophy of democratic education, Kilpatrick argued that the project method of teaching was essential to education in a democratic community:

As the purposeful act is thus the typical unit of the worthy life in a democratic society, so also should it be made the typical unit of school procedure. We of America have for years increasingly desired that education be considered as life itself and not as a mere preparation for later living. If we apply this criterion to the common run of American schools we find exactly the discouraging results indicated above. It is the thesis of this paper that these evil results must inevitably follow the effort to found our educational procedure on an unending round of set tasks in conscious disregard of the element of dominant purpose in those who perform the tasks.\textsuperscript{21}

Kilpatrick’s contributions to service-learning theory are various and immense. His most important and enduring contribution, however, is not his explication of the purposeful act or the project method’s relationship to democracy. Other progressive educators, such as Dewey, had made those points already. Rather, Kilpatrick is important


to service-learning because of the specificity of his suggestions for educational practice.

The steps of “project method” contained most of the components that contemporary service-learning educators suggest. He wrote that

the following steps have been suggested: purposing, planning, executing, and judging. It is in accord with the general theory here advocated that the child as far as possible take each step himself. The function of the purpose and the place of thinking in the process need but be mentioned. Attention may be called to the fourth step, that the child as he grows older may increasingly judge the result in terms of the aim and with increasing care and success draw from the process its lessons for the future.  

These “steps” were obvious antecedents to contemporary service-learning practice and echoed John Dewey’s description of the thinking process.  

Paul Hanna and the Progressive Education Association

The pragmatic/progressive movement in public education strengthened throughout the decade of the 1920s as Dewey and Kilpatrick argued for progressive educational reform. In 1931, Dewey repeated the call for Kilpatrick’s project method approach by advocating it as a “Way out of Educational Confusion,” and George Counts took the progressives to task while maintaining the hope that community based schools could "build a new social order." In 1936, a study was published by the Progressive Education Association (PEA) that looked specifically at community service activities by a variety of youth organizations around the country. It was the most ambitious study of

---

22 ibid., 17.


community service among youth before the 1970s, and its theoretical clarity is especially impressive.

The 1936 PEA study took the form of a survey directed by Paul Hanna. The survey team sent questionnaires to youth organizations asking for descriptions of community service projects and specific benefits for both server and served. The study was undertaken during the depression and at the height of social programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and other “alphabet” depression remedies. Though the survey responses provided interesting stories of youth solving community problems through service projects, the important aspect of the study for the present discussion was the clear theory that accompanied the survey results. It was the pen of William Kilpatrick that provided the philosophical basis for the study. Following an initial discussion couching public education within democracy, Kilpatrick argued that there are specific notions that must be part of any community education theory:

As for the problem before us now, we wish to build up in our young people a sensitiveness to such community deficiencies as they can help to correct. We wish them to be so sensitive to possible community improvements that they will of themselves see new opportunities and wish to take hold of them. To sense such a situation so as to be stirred by it to action--this is the first step in dealing with that situation. The second step follows at once. If we are really stirred to action and wish to act intelligently, we shall study the situation to see what should be done. This neglected spot in our village is (by step 1) an eyesore, to be improved if possible. Now (step 2) we ask what can be done about it, or what we should do. Shall we ask the owner to clean it up? Or shall we ask his permission to make a playground of it? What would it cost to make a playground? What kind of clearing and grading would be necessary? It is at any rate quite clear that good study would be necessary to answer these questions and decide what to do. The third step, of how to do it, follows so closely upon the second as often to merge into it. We could not decide what to do until we decided, at least within limits, how to do it. So here we have the further detailed study necessary for making all the plans. The fourth step is the execution of the plan. Here we have the kind of

study that goes with carrying out the plan, and particularly the study that goes with watching how well our plans work out. We shall probably have to revise our plans as we try them out. If so, more study and learning. The fifth step is the backward view: Now that we have finished, what have we learned? How could we do it better another time? What lessons of any or all kinds shall we draw?  

Kilpatrick's discussion contained the theoretical essentials of service-learning education. Kilpatrick fleshed-out his ideas in finishing the introduction to the Hanna study:

Why, next, do we wish community activities? The answer follows hard upon the preceding. A community activity can have a reality and a challenge that no lesser activity can properly have. Moreover, it serves to bring the youthful group (school or church or club, etc.) into desirable intimate contact with the surrounding community. To do something which others count significant ranks very high among the satisfying and steadying influences in life. For the young to feel that their activities have community significance is to accord to them a worth and standing that will call out the best the young have to give. Why "cooperative community activities"? What, finally, is meant by cooperative community activities, and why are they desired? Here again we build on the preceding. By cooperative community activities we mean those in which many share, preferably the old along with the young.

Paul Hanna further developed the community education concept set out by Kilpatrick in describing his research criteria for good community educational practice. He explained that if community service was to be a vital pedagogical approach then the participating students must

1. Sense its social significance. 2. Have a part in planning the project. In a democracy, probably no learnings are more significant than those which result from social experiences in which a group need is faced cooperatively, analyzed, possible solutions projected, tentative plans agreed upon, and the task eventually culminated. 3. Have some sporting chance of carrying the project proposed through to more or less successful conclusion. 4. Accept the responsibility for success or failure of a project. Any vital learning experience is incomplete until the plan and its execution have been evaluated in terms of successes and/or

---


27 Ibid., 14.
failures in the social environment.  5. Actually grow in total personality as a result of the work undertaken.\textsuperscript{28}

Importantly, in light of contemporary service-learning theory, Hanna discussed the value of the project to the community as well as to the student:

1. Any project must culminate in the actual improvement of living in the community.  2. Projects must clearly be an obligation of youth as well as adulthood.  3. In so far as possible, projects must get at the basic problems of improving social welfare.\textsuperscript{29}

Finally, Hanna directed his readers back to John Dewey in echoing the notion that education be approached in the same way that humans think and act to solve problems.

Hanna remarked,

This thinking process has the following distinguishing phases: (a) Something is at stake. A state of confusion or disequilibrium has occurred. We are aroused to take action to achieve a better adjustment. (b) The difficulty is located and defined. No intelligent effort at improvement can be made until the nature and source of the unsatisfactory aspects of the situation are clarified. (c) An hypothesis is developed for meeting the difficulty and improving the conditions. This projection of proposals and plans is the most important technique which man possesses for continued progress. (d) A detailed plan of operation with continued reflective criticism of each step of the plan is worked out. (e) The best experimental method in terms of the purpose, materials and tools available, and the unpredictable elements which arise in the process of carrying out the plan must be utilized. (f) When the plan has been carried out the results must be measured in terms of the values anticipated at the beginning, and the plan itself must be criticized for possible improvement. Furthermore, the enterprise must be judged in terms of its effect on those who participated in its solution; that is, it must be judged in terms of its enrichment of personalities.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Paul Hanna, \textit{Youth Serves the Community} (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 11.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 40.
Progressivism Wanes

The late 1930s brought Nazi Germany to the fore of international concern. Adolf Hitler's military movements distracted America from educational concerns and turned all thought to its inevitable involvement in WWII. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, many school systems practiced the progressive, service-learning approach to education, but by 1940 progressivism in public education waned. School districts that supported progressive programs were challenged on both political and economic grounds, and lost. Though progressive thought remained a small part of public school operation in some districts, the service-learning concept generally lost favor with politicians, the American public, and educational critics who viewed it as "soft pedagogy." 31

By the 1950s, only William Kilpatrick and a few of his ardent followers carried the service-learning concept forward through their work with the citizenship education project (CEP) at Columbia University’s Teachers College. With generous support from the Carnegie Foundation and other benefactors, CEP continued to use Kilpatrick’s ideas particularly in citizenship education. By the mid 1950s, little was left of the progressive movement and the service-learning notion they had developed. The Progressive Education Association itself changed its name and then disbanded in 1955. In 1957, with the launch of the Russian-built Sputnik rocket, came the temporary death knell for progressivism. The Russian launch brought chagrin to most Americans and a call to concentrate on tough academic instruction and not the “soft pedagogy” of experiential educational approaches that the progressive educational movement advocated.

31 For an informative discussion of the progressive movement in education and
Though the conceptual history of service-learning and the progressive movement in education are not precisely the same, the fading of progressive philosophy from the forefront of the American public school debate took with it the conceptual notion of service-learning. It would be nearly fifteen years before service-learning regained its foothold in educational thought and practice. The re-birth of the service-learning concept came about in its original birthplace—the American South. This rebirth came not in K-12 education, but in the practice of southern universities.

The Rebirth of the Service-learning Concept: "The Pioneers"

In 1967, out of such programs as Peace Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and Donald Eberly’s National Service plans, came the first use of the phrase “service-learning.” The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) established a service-learning internship program in 1964. By 1967, the program involved more than 300 college students. William O’Connell explained in 1972,

> The term service-learning has been adopted as best describing this combination of the performance of a useful service for society and the disciplined interpretation of that experience for an increase in knowledge and in understanding one's self. The coupling of action and reflection has implications for both education and vocation and also is seen as more than a useful technique for performing a task or for educational enrichment. It leads to practice in the development of a lifestyle.  

The SREB service-learning program did not develop from a detailed philosophical discussion, as it had 35 years earlier. It did, however, re-introduce to public education the "soft pedagogy" issue, see Arthur Zilversmit, Changing Schools (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).


some of the concepts found in progressive educational philosophy. The specific concept of service-learning, and experiential education generally, found their way back into educational reform talk and practice throughout the American South as a result of the SREB internship program.

With the Vietnam War continuing and thousands of young Americans hoping for possible service alternatives to the draft, the gates were opened for service-learning practice and theory. In 1969, the Atlanta Service-Learning Conference began “with 500 students engaged in service-learning projects.” The Atlanta project culminated in a conference and publication of “Atlanta Service-learning Conference Report--1970.” In 1971, ACTION, a federal agency, was established to bring together and oversee such programs as Peace Corps, VISTA, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), and the National Student Volunteer Program (NSVP). Also in 1971, The National Society for Experiential Education was brought into being and became involved in advocating service-learning education.

In 1972, ACTION published *High School Student Volunteers*. This manual provided a discussion of volunteer programs in high schools and suggested how such programs might be established and run. The authors listed three “essential ingredients” for a successful high school volunteer program:

1. The community must have needs that can be met by student volunteers. 2. Students must be interested in working hard on a volunteer basis to meet those needs.

---

34 As Donald Eberly points out in *A Promise to Keep*, these options never fully materialized.

needs. 3. The school must support the effort by coordinating individual projects into a coherent program.36

The authors of the manual also argued that only public schools could focus and reinforce the volunteers’ experiences to insure that real learning resulted. They were convinced that “reviewing their community work in class, students become better volunteers; drawing on their experience in the field, volunteers become better students.”37 The ACTION authors explained why service and learning were important for public school students and how the two might be incorporated into K-12 education. The publication of the ACTION manual was particularly important for service-learning's rebirth because it had not been part of public school pedagogy for the 35 years prior to its publication.

Through federal agencies such as ACTION and professional organizations such as the Association for Experiential Education, service-learning grew both as a concept and a practice, particularly on college campuses during the middle and late 1970s. For the most part, however, service-learning remained on the periphery of educational reform as a somewhat underdeveloped internship idea. In 1979, the National Student Volunteer Program was renamed and became the National Center for Service Learning (NCSL) and published the first issue of the journal “Synergist” in which are found the “Three Principles of Service-Learning.” These Principles became the basis of a widening philosophical discussion returning to the question of how to define service-learning education.38


37 Ibid., 4-5.

A Conservative Backlash: The Reagan Years

The return to service-learning education, manifested in the establishment of the NCSL, ran aground as many educational initiatives have in the past. In 1980, the election of Ronald Reagan ushered in a conservative backlash to progressive educational policy. This backlash once again brought a temporary end to the progressive/pioneering education reforms of the 1970s. What Sputnik had done in the late 1950s, conservative educational policy did in the 1980s. The NCSL was shut down in 1982, and service-learning once again disappeared from educational talk and practice for most of the decade. It was, however, a relatively brief silence for the service-learning concept.

In 1985, several college and university presidents formed Campus Compact, giving voice once again to the idea that college and university students should learn through serving their communities. In 1986, the federal government established Youth Service America (YSA), which advocated and supported student service by providing both funding and training. However, it was not until 1989 that service-learning had its third rebirth as an educational reform for public, K-12 education in The United States.

In 1989, the Johnson Foundation sponsored the Wingspread Conference on Youth Service at which more than 70 organizations collaborated to write “ten principles of good service-learning practice.” The Wingspread report was the first conceptual reformulation of service-learning since the late 1960s and early 1970s internship programs and the first of many conceptual descriptions of service-learning constructed in the 1990s. The Wingspread principles were the most complete attempt to clarify service-

---

39 The Johnson Foundation co-sponsors conferences on various public interest matters at its center in Racine, Wisconsin.
leaning conceptually since the early part of the twentieth century. The principles
developed at the Wingspread conference are accepted widely as the guide for present
service-learning practice. Though the concepts contained in the document are less than
complete, they do capture the character of service-learning education. Following a brief
“preamble,” the conference participants suggested that a successful service-learning
program

1. Engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good. 2. Provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience. 3. Articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved. 4. Allows for those with needs to define those needs. 5. Clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved. 6. Matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances. 7. Expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment. 8. Includes training, supervision monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals. 9. Insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved. 10. Is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations. 40

These "principles" became the rules of engagement for service-learning, and though they
did not answer the numerous philosophical questions asked by progressive educators,
they did provide some guidance and a framework from which contemporary service-
learning advocates could start.

In 1990, to encourage the civic engagement called for by the Wingspread
Principles, Congress passed, and President George Bush, Sr. signed, the National and
Community Service Act of 1990. This first in a series of federally supported grant
programs made 75 million dollars available through the Points of Light Foundation and
the Commission on National and Community Service for community service activities.

40 “Principals of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning” (Racine Wisconsin: The Johnson Foundation, Inc.), 1-2.
Service-learning partnerships between communities and schools (both public and private) were encouraged through the awarding of grant money. In 1993, as a centerpiece of his first term in office, President Bill Clinton gave further life to the service-learning movement by signing the National and Community Trust Act. This legislation created the Corporation for National Service (CNS), a federal agency that would administer both AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America programs. Learn and Serve America, several professional organizations, and a handful of major universities pushed to institute service-learning in K-12 education. As advocates, these organizations still provide the means and much of the research support for service-learning in K-12 education initiated a decade ago.

The Service-learning Concept Outgrows Itself

In the last fifteen years there has been an explosion of literature related to service-learning research and practice. As is discussed in the first chapter of this study, much of that recent discussion calls for a conceptual re-evaluation of service-learning education. The Corporation for National Service and the other organizations mentioned above continue to provide grant monies and technical suggestions for service-learning practitioners; however, technical support and money add little to the service-learning concept philosophically. This lack of philosophical clarity is particularly problematic for teachers in need of a foundational rationale for service-learning practice. One only has to

---

41 Americorps funds and supports college student service in exchange for some tuition money and Learn and Serve America provides the same for school and community based service-learning projects.

42 These supporters of service-learning include such groups as the Association for Experiential Education, Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform and
visit the Corporation for National Service web site to see that conceptual muddiness has affected service-learning practice. At the CNS web site are various definitions of service-learning presented as “a basis for discovering the common ground among them and to promote discussion about the meaning of service learning.”\footnote{Corporation for National Service Website (www.cns.gov/learn).} Such definitions might well encourage discussion, but they leave the concept as a whole (as well as each of its individual components) unclear.

According to the National and Community Service Act of 1990, service-learning is an educational method

Under which students learn and develop through active participation in . . . thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs; that is integrated into the students’ academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the service activity; that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and that enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.\footnote{Ibid.}

Timothy Stanton, a leader and advocate in the field says that

Service learning appears to be an approach to experiential learning, an expression of values--service to others, which determines the purpose, nature and process of social and educational exchange between learners (students) and the people they serve, and between experiential education programs and the community organizations with which they work.\footnote{Timothy Stanton, “Service Learning: Groping Toward A Definition” in Jane C. Kendall and Associates, \textit{Combining Service and Learning} (Raleigh: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, 1990), 85.}

universities such as the University of Colorado at Boulder and the University of Michigan.

\footnote{Corporation for National Service Website (www.cns.gov/learn).}

\footnote{Ibid.}

Literally dozens of organizations that support service-learning explain its conceptual basis differently. One such organization, the Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform, defines service-learning as

a method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully-organized service experiences . . . that meet actual community needs; that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community; that are integrated into each young person's academic curriculum; that provide the structured time for a young person to think, talk, and write about what he/she did and saw during the actual service activity; that provide young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities; that enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom; and, that help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.\(^{46}\)

In Research Agenda For Combining Service and Learning in the 1990s, Dwight Giles, et al, define service-learning as both a program type and a philosophy of education. As a program type,

Service-learning includes myriad ways that students can perform meaningful service to their communities and to society while engaging in some form of reflection or study that is related to the service. As a philosophy of education, service-learning reflects the belief that education must be linked to social responsibility and that the most effective learning is active and connected to experience in some meaningful way.\(^{47}\)

Rob Shumer, reporting on a Delphi study on service-learning, describes the current philosophical problem best when he writes,

While there is consensus on some aspects of service-learning, for the most part there is still disagreement on the details. There is consensus that service-learning can be envisioned through forms, or types, and that these forms are best understood through specific examples. There is general agreement that service-learning occurs in two general categories: school-based and community-based. Twenty-nine different dichotomous variables ('continua') were named which

\(^{46}\) "Standards of Quality for School-based Service Learning" (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform, 1993).

Dr. Shumer cautions that service-learning should not be penned-in by conceptual dogmatism. However, as he says, service-learning remains “amorphous” and, therefore, confused in its meaning. Until there is philosophical clarity, service-learning will continue to ebb and flow with the political/educational tides as it has throughout its history. Without a clear conceptual understanding, service-learning practice will suffer. The history of service-learning education reminds reformers that philosophical clarity is essential if true reform is to happen and, more importantly, to last.

**Historical Consequences For Practice: Looking Back to the Future**

In an interesting and insightful article predicting yet another demise of service-learning education, Don Hill “looked back” to the year 2010 and tried to analyze what went wrong. He gives ten reasons for service-learning’s disappearance from the educational reform scene. Though each reason he gives has a sense of its own, it is his second reason that identifies the current "felt problem" with service-learning education and that is the subject of the rest of this study. Hill "looked back" and "predicted" that Service learning remained an ambiguous or fuzzy concept to the majority of teachers. In order to meet political pressures to allocate government and foundation money to a wide variety of eager schools, the definition of service learning was commonly broadened to the point where almost anything could fit. Service learning, by becoming everything, became almost nothing.\(^{49}\)

---


\(^{49}\) Don Hill, “Death of a Dream: Service Learning 1994-2010: An Historical
The history of service-learning education surely involves numerous other players not mentioned here. But, the point of this necessarily brief historical outline is that the incredible growth of service-learning practice has not had a corresponding growth in conceptual understanding. In fact, service-learning has taken on a confusing, amorphous character as groundless practice races beyond understanding. In light of where the service-learning concept has been historically, it must be grounded first and foremost in a strong conceptual foundation. For its practice to be successful and defensible against the ever-shifting sands of educational criticism, the driving philosophical concepts of service, experiential learning, reflection, and reasonable aims must be clearly understood in the context of service-learning education. The chapters that follow are an attempt to provide that clarity.

Analysis by One of the Dreamers,” (Service Learning 2000 Center, Stanford University, 1997), 2.
CHAPTER 3
THE MEANING OF SERVICE IN SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION

Alexis de Tocqueville observed early in American history that the practice of community service resulted from the political reality of the newly formed American democracy.¹ Robert Bellah describes de Tocqueville's observation:

Through active involvement in common concerns, the citizen can overcome the sense of relative isolation and powerlessness that results from the insecurity of life in an increasingly commercial society. Associations along with decentralized local administration mediate between the individual and the centralized state. Associational life, in Tocqueville's thinking, is the best bulwark against the condition he feared most: the mass society of mutually antagonistic individuals, easy prey to despotism.²

The political situation of democracy combined with the religious beliefs of the American founders and the physical demands of the new frontier to create an American service ethic that remains part of American character to this day. Helping one another was and is an essential activity for the survival of democracy. The service ethic filled the void of lost connections that resulted when America turned from aristocracy to democracy--from a people with a common history, to a people living by a common creed.³

Though the general notion of service that de Tocqueville observed in America’s infancy remains, the particulars of the concept have evolved to include many different

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America (New York: The New American Library, 1956 [1835]), 197.
ideas depending on the service situation. The service ethic has developed over time and now entails such practices as philanthropy, obligation, charity, volunteerism, punishment, and mutuality. The growing sophistication of the service idea has lead to confusion about just which idea of service can best explain its place in service-learning education. It is crucial to good practice that educators understand precisely which concept of service should be called upon for service-learning education.

The understanding of the service concept cannot be ignored in discussions of what constitutes good service-learning education. Service is, after all, one of the major concepts advocated by service-learning educators and must be understood clearly in order to practice service-learning successfully. Much theoretical work has been done in fleshing-out what, for example, philanthropy means to a community and what it means to the psyche of the "server" and the "served." Without an equally sophisticated understanding of the implications of service in service-learning, meaningless service, community detachment and missed educational opportunities can result. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the concept of service in the particular situation of service-learning. Ultimately, this study advocates conceptualizing community service the way Howard Radest does in his book, Community Service: Encounter With Strangers, as the most fitting description of what it means to serve within service-learning education.⁵


⁵ Howard Radest, Community Service: Encounter with Strangers; (Westport, Ct.: Praeger, 1993).
Hegemonic Notions of the American Service Ethic

An easy first step in clarifying the service idea is to delineate how service should not be conceptualized and practiced in service-learning. Service clearly cannot be identified with the notions of philanthropy, charity, or noblesse oblige found in the American poorhouse tradition. Each of these, though slightly different conceptually, are one-sided attempts to help the "lost," "lonely" and "needy" of the nation or neighborhood. They are approaches to serving the less fortunate that develop as monologues in which the needy are talked about and tended to by those who perceive themselves as need-less; that is, they are attempts to serve others whether those others want to be served or not. Each concept, in its own way, develops into practice that emphasizes the privilege and power inherent in hegemonic relationships. Service as punishment, a practice common in legal judgments in and out of public schools, is not simply unworkable--it is dangerous to the practice of community service. It can develop into a powerful tool used to control already marginalized students. Even volunteerism, when closely examined, does not have the characteristics necessary to completely understand service-learning education.

Philanthropy as Community Service

Robert Payton helps clarify philanthropy when he says "one-way transfers are not all philanthropic, but all philanthropic transfers are one-way." Payton argues that philanthropy has developed (especially recently) as a means to help the needy in the face of a declining market interest in state-sponsored welfare. In his market analysis, philanthropy is an economic endeavor that is a one-way transfer and a desirable

---


7 Ibid., 118-130.
replacement for lost interest in state-sponsored financial support for the needy. Philanthropy in this sense is what Payton calls the "third sector" (the other two being the public and private sectors). Payton does include some form of dialogue between haves and have-nots in his discussion, but it is the dialogue of the market: if I help you, then you owe something to someone, if not now, then in the future.  

Brian O'Connell mirrors Payton's ideas in suggesting that philanthropy ought to "fill-in" where government support could not or should not do so. As such, he regards philanthropy as an important part of "personal and national freedom." Though O'Connell calls the endeavor a “discourse,” it is a discourse among the privileged problem-solvers, not between the needy and those who provide for that need. Nor does philanthropy account at all for the possibility that the served can provide an educational service to the servers or that the “servers” are in need as well.

Most importantly for the present discussion, philanthropy is not the idea of service that is appropriate for service-learning education. The pretended "discourse" between privileged power and the needy is one that complicates rather than eases lost connections found in American class and creed society. Philanthropy does not reconnect a community in any sense hoped for by advocates of service-learning. It is, as many critics argue, antithetical rather than supportive of the practice of democracy.

---

8 Ibid., 52-53.


almost can picture a Shakespearean aside as the privileged protagonist-in-the-know informs the audience-as-public what is *really* going on with the needy and how the powerful are fixing their problems. The "fixes" come through contributions of money to organizations set-up to help "those" folks.

Nor is philanthropy as service, educational. As the progressives argued, "to learn it, is to live it." In a philanthropic act there is no "living it," no social *interaction* that is necessary for active reconstruction of problematic experience. There is no opportunity to "feel with" the other, in the words of Nel Noddings, and, therefore, there is no opportunity to learn about the "other."¹¹ Philanthropy additionally ignores the fact that to make something different and better of a "felt problem," there must be, as John Dewey argued, a complete act that includes experience, mediation, planning, implementation, and evaluation to see what resultant change has occurred in the problematic situation.¹²

In short, philanthropy does not provide for a reconstruction of the situation. Lacking meaningful interaction in experience, reflective thinking does not occur or is incomplete, and learning to manipulate ideas in genuine experience does not happen. Future philanthropic experiences remain equally meaningless, and stagnation rather than growth results. There is no development of disposition or habit of mind necessary to learning. Philanthropy clearly is not educational and, therefore, cannot be embraced in service-learning education.


Charity as Community Service

Though there are subtle and important nuances among philanthropy and its sister concepts charity and noblesse oblige, the problems they bring to the service-learning notion are nearly identical. Charity is more than simply a financial attack on the problems of society, such as that practiced by philanthropists. There is often personal service as well. Charity, however, is no more useful an idea than philanthropy when it comes to service-learning education. As Benjamin Barber points out, "the language of charity drives a wedge between self-interest and altruism, leading students to believe that service is a matter of sacrificing private interests to moral virtue." This concept of service leads to one-way interactions where only a one-way transfer is seen as important. As with philanthropy, charity portrays service as an endeavor in which only the served has needs and only the server has goods.

Robert Coles describes this characteristic of charity in his important study, The Call of Service. Coles describes charity as "an old fashioned name for much that gets called service. For some of us the word has patronizing implications--toss 'them' something called 'charity.'" His father understood this problem as well: "my father, on the other hand, was critical of comfortable people giving an hour or two here or there and utterly avoiding taking a hard look at how our institutions work (and for whom)." Coles describes charity as an enterprise based on strong religious and spiritual notions of service. It provides an important means of support for Americans in need. Charity is not

13 Barber, Aristocracy of Everyone, 207.
14 Coles, Call to Service, 54.
15 Ibid., 54.
helpful, however, in understanding the practice of service within service-learning education. There is nothing in the concept of charity that is, again, educational to the server, and community division rather than community connection can be the result. As Coles remembers,

“"We don't want your damn charity" was a refrain I heard from many poor people, black and white, in the South and in Appalachia; they were determined to claim as a right what others offered as a gesture of personal generosity."\(^1\)

Benjamin Barber makes clearer the objection to the practice of service as a "one way transfer" such as that found in the concepts of philanthropy and charity. He correctly argues that in a democracy it is the interaction of server and served that is most important to democratic community building and democratic education. Barber writes in An Aristocracy of Everyone:

Many draw a misleading and dangerous picture of service as the rich helping the poor or the poor paying a debt to their country as if "community" means only the disadvantaged and needy and does not include those performing service.\(^1\)

Viewing service in reverse, many participants in charity "serve" (give money and time) in order to assuage their guilt about being one of the "haves" rather than the "have nots," and make the monologue baser even than what Barber suggests. The working out of guilt transforms charity into a completely self-serving activity.\(^1\) In this case, as one well-known cultural critic has said,

The guiding purpose here is the spiritual animation of the giver, not the alms he dispenses. The person who has given a year in behalf of someone or something

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{17}\) Barber, Aristocracy of Everyone, 210.

\(^{18}\) Coles discusses this at length, particularly through repeating his conversations with Anna Freud to the reader on this topic. See particularly, Call To Service.
else is himself better for the experience. National service is not about reducing poverty; it is about inducing gratitude.\textsuperscript{19}

Clearly this is not a workable notion for service-learning education.

Obligation as Community Service

The idea of noblesse oblige is an even more un-democratic and mis-educative concept than is charity. It denotes an aristocratic obligation. As such, it is part and parcel of the language and practice of European aristocracy, complete with noble breeding and the responsibilities that come with it. Rarely is "noblesse oblige" mentioned by name in discussions of community service because of its bald-faced reference to undemocratic and clearly hegemonic practice. Unfortunately, as Richard Kraft notes, it is the most characteristic of many service-learning programs:

In research on service learning conducted as a result of CNCS venture grants in Colorado . . . reflection for or with service recipients was reported in only 1\% of the grant recipients' projects, and in only 4\% of the projects was discourse encouraged among students and recipients regarding the effects and/or design of the service. Discourse throughout the project between service partners should be the hallmark of the service experience.\textsuperscript{20}

Active interaction between “server” and “served” is a necessary part of service-learning education. Without discussions about why one has democratic obligations to others, and void of worthwhile reflection on what one who serves may receive in return, service involvement degenerates into privileged obligation. The conceptual assumption of privilege perpetuates the belief that social class division is natural to a democracy and that one's position in that system indicates individual worth.


Punishment as Community Service

Another practice commonly found in public school settings (and at criminal sentencing hearings) that should be divorced from service-learning is compulsory service as punishment. Unfortunate ties between rule breaking and service have developed as more and more often (especially among youth) community service is assigned as part of a "criminal" sentence. In many public schools, rule breakers can be found performing "service" to the school as punishment for unacceptable behavior. This "service" often takes the form of custodial chores (cleaning, moving furniture) performed before, during or after the school day. It is reminiscent of the chain gang mentality that viewed "service" performed in public as proof that rule breakers will be punished and is done with the hope that it will deter others from breaking rules.

The ramifications of associating "community service" with punishment are far-reaching. As punishment, service develops into a political tool that the powerful use to correct and control the behavior of the powerless. The results are particularly acute when the “punishment” takes place without reflection about why the behavior was unacceptable and how the service is related to the "crime." Students, understandably, perceive service to be something that results from misbehavior, rather than as a democratic, educational principle. The “call of service” can be destroyed when service is used as punishment.

Volunteerism as Community Service

A concept regaining popularity recently, particularly as public schools look for parental and other adult involvement, is that of volunteerism. "Volunteer" has an altruistic ring to it. It means, simply, one who gives of him- or her-self freely. However, upon examining the language and practice associated with volunteering, it becomes clear
that the concept is not descriptive of service necessary to service-learning. The volunteer concept is incomplete because, as Howard Radest argues, it (like philanthropy, charity, noblesse oblige, and punishment) lacks an understanding of democratic community building and connecting:

Community service also conveys a transcending purpose which volunteering does not. It endorses the search for the lost connection even while it is ambivalent about the virtues of those to whom it is addressed. The volunteer, although seldom alone in his or her task, responds as an individual. He or she is the autonomous citizen making a personal choice. In the appeal to volunteers we are directed to the work to be done. The community service participant, on the other hand, is embedded in an environment filled with symbols and references, a gender and class and caste environment, and finally a preparatory environment. Community service is addressed to the participant’s needs as much as if not more than to the work to be done. It is addressed too, to the transcending purposes of the work to be done. In a sense, the present is more significant for the volunteer than the past or the future. But it is the past and the future which help to make sense of community service.21

The idea of volunteering lacks the democratic notion of connecting and community and therefore must be avoided in service-learning practice.

Mutuality as Community Service

The elimination of these traditional notions of service for service-learning is helpful, but incomplete. There remains the project of coming to complete understanding of the service idea in the particular practice of service-learning. The most obvious shortcoming common to each of the above conceptions of service is that there is no room made for interaction. None of them takes into account the dialectical nature of service activity in service-learning education. Each paints a picture of service as action with little or no substantial interaction. A concept commonly and successfully employed to explain the interaction that should occur in service-learning is mutuality, or

21 Radest, Community Service, 44.
synonymously, reciprocity. Howard Radest, among others, argues that mutuality is one conceptual component of what is meant when describing service. It is, in fact, commonly mentioned in theoretical discussions of service-learning education.  

Community service is based on the perception of need: "Need is a leading character in community service. Where I am in the story, however, shapes its meaning for me. With the encounter, the idea of need becomes problematic." The problem that comes in the encounter is precisely that of hegemony discussed above. With need come the needy and, more often than not, a power relationship. Admitting need is admitting class divisions. The admitting of class division in service distinguishes the server and the served and separates rather than connects the two groups of "strangers."  

For community service to work in service-learning education, these dividing lines must be blurred in the realization that the server also is in need and receives a service as well as providing one. The needs that can be met on the part of the server include a richer understanding of the nature of diversity, a deeper understanding of the particular population being served, and, the academic ability to carry out lessons from classroom learning in experiential problem-solving. It is the interaction described either as mutuality or reciprocity that makes service-learning education socially and politically powerful, for it is through mutual interaction that the lessons of the served to the server  

---


23 Radest, Community Service, 79.
can be learned and thereby influence future behavior. It is also through the interaction of server and served that academic or technical skills can be enhanced through ethical use. Mutual
ity explains that not only is academic/cognitive training expanded through the interactive service experience, but learning about “strange,” unfamiliar social worlds, and developing new ethical dispositions crucial to democratic connection, occur as well. It is in the interaction, or the "two-wayness," of the stranger-self relationship that is important and mandated by the idea of mutuality.

Robert Rhoades points out that the idea of mutuality is echoed in numerous discussions of the community service ethic.\(^{24}\) For Jane Kendall, mutuality is "the exchange of both giving and receiving between the 'server' and the person or group 'being served'" and is the core concern of community service.\(^{25}\) Nel Noddings, in advocating a moral ethic of care, suggests that the interaction between server and served should be seen not as empathy, but as a receiving of the other as part of him- or herself:

> The notion of "feeling with" that I have outlined does not involve projection but reception. I have called it "engrossment." I do not "put myself in the other's shoes," so to speak, by analyzing his reality as objective data and then asking, "How would I feel in such a situation?" On the contrary, I set aside my temptation to analyze and to plan. I do not project; I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality.\(^{26}\)

For Noddings, one becomes emotionally attached to the other in the reciprocity of the


\(^{26}\) Noddings, *Caring*, 30.
service act. In any of these ways of seeing service, it is the persistence of otherness that generates the mutual, interactive relationship between doer and done-to.

The reciprocal relationships advocated by Kendall, Noddings, and Radest, can eliminate, or at least dilute, the hegemony between haves and have-nots that exists prior to a service experience. These writers answer the criticism leveled earlier in this discussion against the concepts of charity, philanthropy, noblesse oblige, and volunteerism by deepening what it means to encounter a stranger through service. Within this more complete scheme of service, mutuality becomes the core concept to understanding the service component of service-learning education as a dialogue that blurs the line between doer and done-to. In that mutual interaction is the essence of the community service called for in service-learning education.

Howard Radest: A Complete Act of Service

Most service-learning theory begins and ends with the concept of mutuality. Howard Radest, on the other hand, presents ideas that fully explain what community service means. His argument provides a sound conceptual basis upon which service in service-learning education can rest. In Radest's argument, understanding the service act can be complete only with the inclusion of two concepts that he calls "solidarity" and "diversity." In adding solidarity and diversity to mutuality in the understanding of service, Radest suggests a three-component service structure that greatly expands the understanding of service--one that can clearly explain the service idea and its practice in service-learning education.

Howard Radest’s Mutuality

For Radest, the core concept of mutuality is explained by the reciprocal nature of the interaction between "doer" and "done to" and the social relationship that it magnifies:
Community service introduces us tangibly to the reciprocities of doer and done-to. On the positive side, community service is a particular way of learning my human "being" precisely because it is an encounter of strangers with whom I am nevertheless connected by the possibility of a reciprocal interchange of positions. I can be doer; I can be done-to. On the critical side, community service is a way of challenging those relationships that separate human beings into the near-permanent have-s of power and near-permanent have-nots of powerlessness . . . community service is not a transference of what is mine, my surplus of wealth, power, energy, to another as in acts of charity or acts of leadership but rather a restoration of what is mine and what is yours as human beings which actual situations have subverted or even destroyed. To be a doer in the presence of the done to is to respond to the other in myself. Both of us are active; neither is passive.27

Radest is careful not to imply that the reciprocal relationship found in such a notion of service could eliminate differences, particularly cultural differences:

Mutuality should not be confused with similarity. It is precisely because the other remains the other and because I remain myself that community service works out. Our needs will not echo each other and where I am in need some other is able to respond.28

This explanation of mutuality emphasizes, as most discussions of mutuality do, that the one providing service receives as much or more than the one being served. The intense interaction between the server and the "other" provides the opportunity to practice classroom lessons, to reflect critically on the meaning of difference, and to develop a way to reach an understanding of what that difference means to the server and to a community. Mutuality provides the opportunity to experience a "felt problem" in the Deweyan sense and does the reflective thinking that Dewey describes.29 The particular learning theory and concept of reflection embraced in this idea of the complete act of service is discussed fully in the following chapters of this study. It is enough to say here

27 Radest, Community Service, 179-180.

28 Ibid., 180.

29 John Dewey, How We Think: A Restatement.
that it is in mutuality that a problem is dealt with, and it is in mutuality that real and complete learning, therefore, occurs. The exchange of ideas and experiences between server and served provides the opportunity to develop critical, reflective skills and academic training. As Richard Kraft writes,

In this interactive, dialogical form of reflection, individuals can explore each other's opinions, thoughts, desires, and perspectives. Without this emphasis on dialogue between individuals, service learning again becomes one-sided, focusing on the isolated views and perceptions of the student without true understanding of each individual's perspective. Misunderstanding and missed opportunities for learning can occur in isolated reflection.\(^{30}\)

Clearly, mutuality is an important concept to understanding community service in service-learning education.

**Solidarity**

Conceiving community service as simply a matter of mutuality ignores an important educational aspect of community service and, therefore, creates roadblocks to a complete understanding of service-learning. Mutuality itself provides no understanding of dispositional preparation for future encounters with strangers. In Deweyan thought, mutuality alone cannot be educative because it does not provide for habits that lead to future, richer service experiences.\(^{31}\) As Radest puts it, "mutuality, after all, neglects my relationship with the stranger whom I do not encounter, neglects the idea of my readiness


for encounters.\textsuperscript{32} To deal with this conceptual shortcoming, Radest borrows from Richard Rorty and introduces the idea of solidarity:\textsuperscript{33}

Solidarity is the name of my relationship to the stranger who remains unknown--only a person in an abstract sense--but who is, like me, a human being. Solidarity is then a preparation for the future and at the same time a grounding in the present.\textsuperscript{34}

As an act of solidarity, service is habit-forming in the Jamesian sense, for as James says,

Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work.\textsuperscript{35}

In this way Radest's concept of solidarity develops into a disposition toward democratic interaction and service. Solidarity is a readiness to act, to respond to the "stranger." It answers Dewey's demand that projects, to be educational, dispose the individual to future such experiences.\textsuperscript{36} Solidarity is the "acknowledgements of relationships I could have, and in particular, relationships of being needed and being in need," and these acknowledgements "become part of my awareness of myself."\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 183


\textsuperscript{34} Radest, \textit{Community Service}, 183.

\textsuperscript{35} William James, \textit{Psychology: The Briefer Course} (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1985 [1892]), 17.

\textsuperscript{36} Dewey, \textit{Experience and Education}, 89-90.

\textsuperscript{37} Radest, \textit{Community Service}, 184.
Richard Rorty says it this way: Solidarity "is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers." To use the language of Nel Noddings' feminism, solidarity is the ability to "feel with" the stranger. As such, solidarity means that community service prepares one for encounters that might not happen, but could happen. It develops in the student not simply emotional readiness, but a cognitive/imaginative readiness as well. As Radest notes, "above all, solidarity calls for a certain generosity of perception, the will to find the other unthreatening in his or her otherness and to acknowledge the legitimacy of the call of the other upon me." The readiness for future encounters entailed in this view of service can be achieved best through experiential and academic preparation that develops in the student an understanding of the stranger--an understanding that makes empathy available in the interaction. That "feeling with," together with the service experience, gives life to the service and to future "stranger" interactions. Solidarity then, is an essential educational concept within the larger idea of community service, and particularly so for service-learning. It is an attitude to be developed through and for successful community service and includes cognitive learning related to various forms of the "stranger." Solidarity is also the realization that the "doer" (me) is just as much a stranger as the "done to" (the other). Only through this sense of solidarity will mutuality, reciprocity, or a "feeling with" be achieved.

38 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 87.

39 Noddings, Caring, 30.

40 Radest, Community Service, 185.

41 It would be a mistake not to mention the work of G.H. Meade here. It was
Diversity

Mutuality and solidarity make service more understandable. However, though mutuality and solidarity explain the educational issues related to the service component, they do not satisfy the important question of democratic obligation. This obligation (one that de Tocqueville observed more than a century and a half ago) results not from an aristocratic privilege as in noblesse oblige, but from organizing American life around the ideology of democracy rather than around a common cultural history. To place service-learning within democracy is to show the great promise that service-learning has as both an educational and a democratic undertaking.

Mutuality and solidarity are born out of the fundamental "otherness" that is found in American democracy. This "otherness" that is essential to democratic practice must be understood in relationship to service-learning education so that its practice will succeed. To explain this democratic notion, Radest introduces his third component of service, diversity. Radest describes diversity as a "basic form of democratic sociability" that is found not only in distant strangers, but also in those who are familiar to us. Diversity is the realization from day to day living and institutional practice that each of us is different from one another in numerous public and private ways. "Otherness" appears, strangely enough, even when reflecting upon the "differences" within one’s own psyche.

---

Meade who first argued that only in the "me-other" relationship taken into account by the concept of solidarity that selves can develop. In particular, see Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

42 Tocqueville, Democracy in America; Lipsett, Jr., American Exceptionalism.

43 Radest, Community Service, 185.
The diversity recognized in otherness is particularly important to American democracy where responsibility comes through choice and not by inherited roles of responsibility. Choice does not, of course, relinquish one's responsibility. It justifies, in fact necessitates, service as a democratic, problem-solving and educational practice. The absence of inherited roles of responsibility also magnifies diversity of choice as well as diversity of selves. This diversity and individual choice is precisely what Tocqueville meant when describing American character and democratic connection in relation to service. The freedom brought by a national structure grounded in personal choice rather than tradition is both exciting and frightening. It is, however, not simply a matter of race, class, or caste, and problem solution is not simply a matter of calling for tolerance, understanding, or appreciation. As Radest explains,

> Once the possibility of otherness opens up in as radical a form as it has now taken—diversity run wild or the normalization of differing "life-styles" and "life worlds"—then, in a sense, human need and human response acquire novel content more and more rapidly. Added to the usual concerns of need—the typical issues of having and not having that stir the reformer—the encounter with strangers moves onto new territory. Community service in meeting the conditions of diversity initiates us into the organized practice of otherness. Above all, like art and vocation, it denies the temptation to "remain at home."  

The otherness that is played out in diverse lifestyles, beliefs, and histories compels American citizens to serve others within a community; otherness demands that we not "stay at home;" otherness requires community service solutions to local problems. Otherness, understood through the idea of diversity, must be a part of democratic education. Service-learning education is no exception.

---

44 Ibid., 188.
Diversity, in its recognition of the elusive character of the American individual, completes the notion of service fitting for service-learning education. It is the understanding that in any service situation there must exist a dialogue between server and served and the line between the two groups is blurred in that dialogical interaction. Diversity requires that needs of both server and served are met by the other. Diversity necessitates democratic connection—a connection that can be achieved through service-learning education. Service, understood in this way, is educational because it anticipates future encounters, and service thus envisioned teaches that diversity is the essential and unavoidable fact of the democratic experience. Service in service-learning seeks to connect diverse populations, thereby allowing democratic practice to thrive.

These three ideas—mutuality, solidarity, and diversity—capture not only what service means to service-learning, but also capture the necessary relationship between individual and community: a relationship that must be understood if service-learning is to be understood and practiced successfully. Radest concludes that

Community service introduces concreteness into a "conversation" that would otherwise deal in merely symbolic encounters. Indeed, without it we would, as it were, be looking at the travelogue but not doing the traveling, and for ethics and politics, this is a particularly serious indictment. At the same time, the appeal to practice is dangerous, particularly in an environment that invites us to be spectators, to operate "by the numbers" and to pay for surrogates. We are easily misled into confusing doing with secondary activities like fundraising, going to meetings, signing petitions and the like.\textsuperscript{45}

The service in service-learning demands that teachers and students leave the classroom to encounter other living communities where strangers might become familiars. In this way, democratic education aids the establishment of new connections for a truly moral democracy in America.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 188.
Consequences for Practice

As John Dewey argued in *Experience and Nature*, philosophy that ends in abstraction is the worst kind and gives credence to critics who claim it is mere speculation. To avoid that designation, this discussion now turns to matters of practice. What does this three-part service framework--mutuality, solidarity, and diversity--mean for service-learning practice? First and foremost, and again following the thought of John Dewey, this framework demands that the service come about as a means to deal with a truly "felt problem." This conception of service assumes that the service is (to use the language of youth) "for real." If the service "conversation" is not about a real problem, it is merely posturing and politicking. If there is no problem, there is no need to serve. If the problem has been invented or is not felt by the served as well as the servers, artificial or false understanding will result and hegemonic social relationships will remain. As John Dewey explains, "general appeals to a child to think, irrespective of the existence in his own experience of some difficulty that troubles him and disturbs his equilibrium, are as futile as advice to lift himself by his boot-straps."47

The requirement that need exists and is perceived puts the instructor in a place much different than that conceived for teachers traditionally. In fact, it clearly calls for a teacher to be similar, if not precisely the same, as that suggested by John Dewey.48 It is the teacher's responsibility to lead the student close enough to problematic situations that they feel them and become inclined to solve them. In this understanding of service and


education, the teacher respects the interests and felt problems of her students. She must create situations that make her students sensitive to problems and their possible solutions.

As Dewey wrote,

> The point that I have been wishing so far to make is that the possibility of having knowledge become something more than the mere accumulation of facts and laws, of becoming actually operative in character and conduct, is dependent on the extent to which that information is evolved out of some need in the child's own experience and to which receives application to that experience.\(^4^9\)

The service-learning instructor must view education not as preparation for life, but as life complete with problems to be solved and experiences to be remade. She then must provide ways to formulate problem solutions--both in and out of the classroom--and opportunities to apply those solutions to the community problem. In this way, the service activity leads to learning that becomes "operative in character and conduct."

Mutuality demands a particularly intense approach to solving the "felt problem." It requires an interaction, a conversation. Mutuality demands that students meet with strangers such that hegemony be eliminated or at least blurred. Mutuality calls for an interaction that goes beyond the surface realization that a problem exists and beyond the mere volunteerism discussed earlier. When Nel Noddings suggests that in caring and serving one must "feel with" another, she means much more than a simple realization and "fix" of a problem.\(^5^0\) The interaction called for in the notion of mutuality is one that can come only with intense and regular encounters with strangers in need. For public schools operating under the service-learning educational philosophy, it means providing face-to-face encounters between students and strangers. The reciprocal interaction called for in


\(^{5^0}\) Noddings, Caring, 30.
mutuality will be educative beyond what any classroom alone can provide. These regular encounters can soften and ultimately eliminate the power relationship that exists between student and stranger. Ultimately, the stranger no longer will be the "stranger;" instead, community connection and a "feeling with" will replace the "stranger" relationship. The realization of need will replace the desire for power.

Though the interaction called for by mutuality is essential to the service endeavor in service-learning education, classroom activity cannot be ignored. With Radest's foundational concept of solidarity comes the preparatory matter that is necessary in the classroom prior to and following an encounter with the stranger. This educational preparation is aside from any academic understanding gained through the service activities themselves. (These "academic" aims are discussed in Chapter 6.) Solidarity requires that students entering into a service encounter be prepared so that a "generosity of perception" and a "will to find the other unthreatening" are developed in the students.\(^5\) It is in the solidarity idea that habit formation is taken into account through prior preparation. If students are to serve successfully, they must have some understanding of the "strangers" they encounter. They must, as John Dewey argued, be provided experiences that will open future experiences if they are to truly learn.\(^5\)

For example, if students are serving a nursing home population, preparation as to expectations for nursing home patients particularly, and the elderly generally, must be explored in the classroom before the service is performed. This continuing preparation (it cannot end when service begins) might take the form of reading fiction, nonfiction,

\(^5\) Radest, *Community Service*, 185.

viewing films, and other texts accompanied by discussions to prepare the students for the initial service encounter.\textsuperscript{53} These classroom activities must continue throughout the service work and bring an increasing depth of understanding, as the stranger becomes the familiar. Academic preparation not only under girds the ensuing particular service activity, but also advances solidarity generally for future encounters with future "strangers." It develops the habit of readiness to interact open-mindedly with other similar "strangers" for which solidarity calls. "Debriefing" is also necessary following the service activities. Post project reflection (which is discussed in Chapter 5) is essential to developing that sense of solidarity called for by Radest. Finally, service will provide the opportunity to put classroom theory to use, thereby reinforcing academic learning.

The readiness for the particular encounter, and the more general habit of readiness for future encounters with strangers in service activities, brings students to the important realization of "persistent otherness," or diversity. This is particularly important for making community connections in a democracy. Diversity is the realization that we have an ethical responsibility to connect with each other through community service and thereby know the diverse and numerous others that make up a community in a moral democracy--a system based on creed rather than history or ethnicity. Diversity also reminds teachers and students alike that every individual is a stranger in one way or another and every individual is in need. Without the notion of diversity, the realization that we all participate in some way or other as strangers is lost. Without correctly understanding diversity, democratic connection and the sense of time and place called for

\textsuperscript{53} For example, Tracy Kidder, \textit{Old Friends} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).
in service-learning will not develop. Without that understanding, service degenerates into volunteerism where act rather than connection is the focus. For the service-learning practitioner, this means making sure that throughout the process there are opportunities to feel diversity, and it means emphasizing and even celebrating differences. Through the celebration of democratic diversity, a deeper understanding of stranger encounters can be developed--a notion far beyond simply being tolerant or appreciative.

Conceptualizing service in the manner described here makes service-learning an important part of democratic education. Mutuality, solidarity, and diversity, when practiced correctly in service-learning education, can provide students with opportunities to learn essential democratic notions. Service-learning also gives students the opportunity to develop a deep sense of self and a deep understanding of the "other." Alexis de Tocqueville explained nearly a century and a half ago that it is precisely these characteristics that a democracy needs to prevent the despotism that he feared would destroy it. It is, therefore, an approach to education that is demanded by our political system and is the responsibility of America’s system of public education. Only through public education that is part of, not apart from, the community and that serves through interacting with the community can democratic principles be taught and learned.

Many recent studies have shown that participation in basic democratic institutions, such as the practice of voting, has been seriously declining over the last several decades.\(^{54}\) Robert Putnam and others view this decline as a sign that lost connections once established through community activity are increasingly being broken.

Putnam, Robert Bellah, and C. David Lisman see this disconnection as dangerous to democracy. Participation in community activities provided by service-learning education, when service is correctly understood and practiced, can go a long way in re-establishing these disintegrating connections. As Howard Radest, Nel Noddings, Robert Bellah, Robert Rhoades and Jane Kendall argue, reconnection is an essential, definitive goal of community service. Service-learning education is a public practice that can redefine connection and defend against the individualism that Tocqueville argued would leave its citizens prey to tyranny. Service-learning is a way to defend American democracy against the growing practices that divide rather than connect and keep Americans from the increasing individualism created by "bowling alone."


56 Radest, Community Service; Bellah, Habits of the Heart; Lisman, Civil Society; Kendall, Combining Service; Noddings, Caring; Rhoads, Higher Learning.
CHAPTER 4
EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING

As was made clear in the previous chapter of this study, understanding the service concept in service-learning is essential to its successful implementation. Equally necessary is a clear notion of the teaching and learning process that is appropriate to service-learning practice. Learning is the goal of any educational approach, and without philosophical clarity about its meaning and operation, success or failure remains uncertain. This holds true for service-learning education as it has for the numerous approaches that have dominated educational practice over the course of human history. When seen as inextricably tied to service, the learning theory embraced here becomes a powerful educational philosophy.

Leaders in the service-learning community universally classify the educational theory practiced in service-learning as "experiential."\(^1\) In fact, service-learning is a common manifestation of experiential learning theory. Service-learning is, however, only one of several approaches to teaching and learning that is grounded in an experiential pedagogy.\(^2\) To complicate matters further, "experiential educators" utilize a variety of educational practices that may or may not further the understanding of service-


\(^2\) Other experiential education practices include wilderness education, adventure education, internships, and animated learning.
learning. The project of building a learning theory that will foundationally ground
service-learning is particularly difficult because there has been an explosive growth of
literature devoted to experiential education over the last 30 years. The task of clarifying
what experiential education means for service-learning is made even more difficult by
those who argue, correctly, that all pedagogical approaches (from lectures to worksheets
to "hands-on") ultimately are “experiential”: even the half-dozing lecture participant
"experiences" the lecture. On the other hand, John Dewey made clear that not all
experiences are educational, so that service, as understood in the previous chapter, cannot
be founded on a notion of education that ignores genuine problems of experience. How
experiential learning, in contrast to traditional notions of education, is viewed and applied
in the context of a service project must be clarified for service-learning practice to succeed.

As is argued in the Chapter 2 of this study, the progressive educational
philosophers William James, John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick, and Paul Hanna
initially developed the conception and rationale for the experiential education position.
Not until the middle to late nineteenth century did these forward-looking theorists first
argue to eliminate the inherent pedagogical dualism of subject and object found in
traditional epistemological theory. Too often, however, experiential learning is invoked

---

3 This growth is documented in "Editor's Notes: the Boom in Experiential

4 John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), 13;
Directions for Teaching and Learning 73 (Spring 1998): 23.
rather than accounted for as uniquely related to service in service-learning. The aim of this chapter is to clarify what experiential learning means to service-learning practice. This goal necessitates the construction of an appropriate experiential theory from the foundational work of James, Dewey, Hanna and Kilpatrick without which service-learning cannot successfully operate.

**Traditional Notions of Learning and Knowledge**

The break that progressive thinkers made from traditional educational theory and practice was truly revolutionary. However, as John Dewey warned, conceptual revolution is often the criticism of past thought only, rather than the creation of constructive, positive change toward a new and useful philosophical position. For Dewey, criticism, particularly educational criticism, should be used to construct new theory to improve practice. Dewey's point is important: criticizing educational practice is simply the starting point in the more important project of developing better theory. New educational ideas will be useful only in so far as they are understood as fixing specific problems of earlier ones. In this way, the old mistakes will not be repeated and new theory can develop into useful practice. Experiential learning is an example of educational theory that must be understood as an attempt to fix traditional approaches to

---


teaching and learning. To this end, this study turns to a brief description of traditional learning theory.

In explaining his rebellion from traditional educational notions, John Dewey pointed out how "the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without." 8 Epistemological theory has had a parallel pendulum swing throughout its history between Platonic idealism and Lockean empiricism. 9 These pendulum swings characterize the "either-or" (as Dewey described it) history of epistemological /learning theory. 10 Dewey saw that three characteristics fundamentally drive traditional educational philosophy. These are that already established bodies of information and skills are seen as being "transmitted" to students; habits of conduct are developed through conformity to pre-established, standards and rules; and, schools, as institutions, are "marked off from" other community institutions. 11 Dewey clarified both the aims and means of traditional education from these three general characteristics:

The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. Books, especially textbooks, are the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past, while teachers are the organs through which pupils are brought into effective connection with the material.

8 Dewey, Experience and Education, 1.

9 For a discussion of the "either-or" development of epistemological theory as seen at the time of the progressive movement, see Jesse Coursault, The Learning Process (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1907).

10 Dewey, Experience and Education, 2.

11 Ibid., 2.
Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skill are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.\textsuperscript{12}

Jeffrey Howard explains the difference in this way: "In the traditional teaching-learning model, learning is individualistic and privatized; students generally learn by themselves and for themselves. The epistemology that undergirds traditional pedagogy is positivistic and in conflict with communal ways of learning."\textsuperscript{13} In light of the communal nature of service, as conceived in this study (mutual, connected, and interactive), the traditional educational model provides no foundation for service-learning activities.

The Progressive Revolution: A Foundation for Service-Learning

The "either-orness," against which Dewey and his cohorts fought early in the twentieth century, was founded on a widely accepted epistemological dualism that kept mind and matter separated, emphasizing one or the other rather than their interaction. Interaction of subject and object, not separation, makes experience the essential element in knowing and, therefore, the essential part of a successful educational theory on which service-learning can be based. Traditional philosophies of education that emphasize the separation of subject and object do not provide the experiential pedagogy needed for a clear understanding of service-learning practice. The notion of interaction that Dewey credits Francis Bacon and William James with first seeing is needed to explain service-learning as reconnecting, communal, and educational.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 3.

Francis Bacon's Science and William James' Radical Empiricism

As John Dewey argued, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) first conceptualized science and philosophy as dynamic projects involving the interaction of mind and matter rather than merely the study of static concepts. His understanding undermined traditional epistemological theory and ultimately led to a better understanding of the purpose and method of inquiry, knowledge, and, therefore, educational practice. Bacon saw that scientific inquiry is done to control nature rather than to control minds, and that could be achieved only by conceptualizing scientific discovery as an interaction of mind and matter in experience.

Because knowledge is created through this fundamental mind/matter interaction, educational practice should be based on that interaction as well. Service-learning education is no exception. The student/situation project interaction makes service-learning educationally sound. Through “manipulating” or “reconstructing” the project problem, knowledge and understanding are created. This experiential interaction, rather than passive reception of information, is a characteristic of service-learning that makes it a powerful academic pedagogy.


William James' pragmatism influenced the progressive educational revolution as well and provides further foundational grounding for service-learning education. He saw, as Bacon did, that it is in, not out of experience, that knowledge construction takes place. James' argument that pure abstraction is educationally barren characterized the progressive notion of experiential education:

He [the pragmatist] turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth.\(^{16}\)

William James' pragmatism provided a new way of understanding knowledge development--an understanding that knowing is not a problem of mind somehow grasping alien substance, but is one of mind and body interacting with substance. The interaction of self and matter in experience is crucial to knowledge construction, and therefore, teaching, and learning. Service-learning as a purely academic pedagogy is fundamentally based on this understanding of experiential interaction.

In an article characterizing the influence that James has had on experiential educational theory, George Donaldson and Richard Vinson tease out of his "Lectures to Teachers and Students" (1899), eleven basic principles of experiential education.\(^{17}\) These eleven principles could, in fact, appear in contemporary service-learning literature:

1. One Learns best by his/her own activity. 2. Interest is of signal importance to learning. 3. Sensory experience is basic. 4. Effort and vigor make for good

---


\(^{17}\) George W. Donaldson and Richard Vinson, "William James, Philosophical Father of Experience-Based Education: 'The Knower is an Actor,'" *The Journal of Experiential Education* (Fall1979): 7-8.
Donaldson and Vinson argue that William James was the "philosophical father" of experiential education. He was the first to extend his pragmatism to education so clearly, and out of his thinking progressive scholars developed a fully fleshed-out educational theory based on experience--one that foundationally supports service-learning education.

John Dewey's Revolutionary Epistemology

Arguing that service-learning should be viewed as an attempt to "dePlatonize" western educational thought, Ira Harkavy and Lee Benson note that "it can fairly be said: in the beginning there was Dewey." Very little of the huge mass of literature on service-learning education as experiential is absent references to the revolutionary work of Dewey. Unfortunately, aside from some brief articles loosely linking Dewey to service-learning, a complete discussion of Deweyan thought as it works in the experiential practice of service-learning does not exist.

Dewey grounded his argument for an experiential notion of education in an explicit assumption that had been missed in the traditional ways and means of educational practice. That fundamental assumption is that "there is an intimate and

---

18 Ibid., 8.

19 Ira Harkavy and Lee Benson, "De-Platonizing and Democratizing Education as the Bases of Service Learning," New Directions For Teaching and Learning 73 (Spring 98): 11.

20 Giles and Eyler, "Theoretical Roots" 77-85; Mary Hepburn, "Service Learning in Civic Education," 136-142.
necessary relationship between the processes of actual experience and education."²¹ This assumption is simple and straightforward. However, current educational practice based on traditional epistemology largely ignores the intimacy between experience and education. Traditional teaching generally dismisses experience out of hand. As Richard Hopkins maintains,

> The secondary schools in particular show in their instructional practices an almost total disregard for the experience of students. They are arenas of intense control and manipulation endured by an objectified, disembodied, and often alienated student population. For many students, even those who have learned how to work the system, attending school is an inauthentic experience to be endured until real life begins.²²

Artificial curriculum constraints, student preparation for life in some adult "future," and the consideration of student experience as secondary to the digestion and regurgitation of pre-established "knowledge" are antithetical to service-learning education. Service-learning educators must first and foremost understand this "intimate and necessary" relationship between experience and education and incorporate that into practice. The experience/education relationship can best be understood as interactive, social, and continual.

Because education is experiential, it is interactive at a very basic, existential level. That is, human beings are born into a world of objects, and in interacting and manipulating the physical world humans come upon and solve basic problems of existence. Dewey explained in *Democracy and Education*:

> As long as it [a living creature] endures, it struggles to use surrounding energies in its own behalf. It uses light, air, moisture, and the material of soil. To say that it


uses them is to say that it turns them into means of its own conservation. As long as it is growing, the energy it expends in thus turning the environment to account is more than compensated for by the return it gets: it grows. Understanding the word "control" in this sense, it may be said that a living being is one that subjugates and controls for its own continued activity the energies that would otherwise use it up. Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment.23

On its face, this observation appears to have little to do with service-learning education and seems so strongly a truism as to not need comment. However, further analysis shows that understanding experience in this way is a crucial building block to successful service-learning practice.

The importance of the physical fact of existence to service-learning education is that the experience of manipulating objects is essential to learning and living. The young must develop skills and dispositions through genuine object manipulation because that manipulation is the most essential interactive life activity without which knowledge cannot be constructed nor life problems solved. The increasing complexity of object manipulation leads to further success with physical objects and ultimately to the manipulation of ideas to solve problems in experience. For service-learning to be successful as an educational approach, students must manipulate physical objects and mental constructs in the project situation. Manipulating the physical and mental environment in a service project provides students with the opportunity to use their knowledge of the world to attempt a solution to the service problem. From this basic understanding of interaction, the increasingly complex academic disciplines of mathematics, chemistry, and physics, for example, can be taught, applied and, therefore, learned in service-learning education.

23 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 3.
Human interaction, of course, does not involve individuals interacting only with objects and ideas. Humans are not born into a pure objective reality, but arrive in a world that has an already established social organization with already existing social beings. Education is the means by which individuals are introduced into social practice. Education, argues Dewey, is essentially a social process and that characteristic is often ignored in traditional epistemological approaches:

There is the standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience. The permanent social interests are likely to be lost from view. Those which have not been carried over into the structure of social life, but which remain largely matters of technical information expressed in symbols, are made conspicuous in schools. Thus we reach the ordinary notion of education: the notion which ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life, and which identifies it with imparting information about remote matters and the conveying of learning through verbal signs: the acquisition of literacy.\(^{24}\)

A sound educational approach, however, takes into account the social-ness of human existence and incorporates that understanding into practice. As Dewey argues, the social environment is constructed in experience and that construction dictates the learning of social dispositions and habits of behavior. He argued in *Democracy and Education* that the required beliefs cannot be hammered in; the needed attitudes cannot be plastered on. But the particular medium in which an individual exists leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another; it leads him to have certain plans in order that he may act successfully with others; it strengthens some beliefs and weakens others as a condition of winning the approval of others. Thus it gradually produces in him a certain system of behavior, a certain disposition of action.\(^{25}\)

In this way, habits, or dispositions to act, are inculcated into the young.


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 11.
It is vitally important that service-learning practitioners understand and consciously incorporate this social aspect of learning into a service project. Service projects are, as is argued in the previous chapter, examples of social interaction—an attempt at reconnection. Mutuality, as described in this study, is the concept of give and take interaction between "others." A successful service project will incorporate the social idea of "otherness" into it. If a service project is constructed and carried out without keeping the social in mind, unintended habits or dispositions might well develop in place of desired ones. As John Dewey implies, both academic (object manipulation) and social (habit formation) aspects of a service project must be understood clearly if the educational goals of skill acquisition and habit formation are to be met. His notions of social and objective interaction might best be summarized in the following passage from Experience and Education:

It means, once more, that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons. The conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading (in which his environing conditions at the time may be England or ancient Greece or an imaginary region); or the materials of an experiment he is performing. The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had.26

The third Deweyan notion that is particularly helpful for understanding service-learning practice is his idea that experience implies continual growth. He correctly points out that experience is a continuum; that is, present experience is grounded in the past and

---

26 Dewey, Experience and Education, 42. Dewey’s emphasis.
will modify the future. An individual, therefore, is prepared for future life problems based on those that he/she has dealt with in the past. The effect of a present experience on and to future experiences in part indicates the quality of that present experience. When service-learning projects are understood in this light, they become important not only to the task at hand, but are crucial building blocks for future problems that students will experience. Understanding experience as a continuum will also help to indicate what projects will and will not be educationally sound. The idea of continuity is the basis for developing projects that provide the environment necessary for forming good habits—both academic and social. Service-learning projects, as is argued in Chapter 3 of this study, must be structured with future situations in mind. To be successful, the projects must come out of genuine present problems of experience while simultaneously looking to the future.

These notions of experience provide service-learning educators with a foundation upon which to build successful projects. Service projects, in order to be educative, must provide students with the opportunity to operate in a genuine problem situation. The service project allows for the manipulation of objects and ideas related to academic endeavors thereby creating a depth of understanding unmatched by traditional approaches. The project must be social, for only through interacting with others can sought-after habits and dispositions be developed in young people and true community transformation be accomplished. Finally, service experiences should be chosen and organized such that students become open and eager for increasingly difficult projects: they must both help them deal with the present and prepare for the future.

---

27 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 52.
Further Progressive Support for Experiential, Service-Learning Education

John Dewey was not alone in suggesting that education and experience are inextricably connected. William H. Kilpatrick and Paul Hanna, in different ways, both advocated such an educational approach. Kilpatrick suggested a project method approach to education (which Dewey subsequently supported in *The Way Out of Educational Confusion*) driven by what he called a "purposeful act." For Kilpatrick, absent a purpose for an educational activity, a purpose deemed important by the individual student, that activity is useless. An educational activity that is not important in the eyes of the student leads to short-term rote performance rather than to the depth of understanding expected in service-learning. Kilpatrick's idea of the purposeful act mirrors Dewey's demand that educational activity be organized around the genuine interests of the student if that student is to fully develop. Kilpatrick put it this way:

As these questionings rose more definitely to mind, there came increasingly a belief-corroborated on many sides--that the unifying idea I sought was to be found in the conception of wholehearted purposeful activity proceeding in a social environment, or more briefly, in the unity element of such activity, the hearty purposeful act.

He provided a familiar example of how a purposeful act or lack thereof can make or break an educational project:

If she did in hearty fashion purpose to make the dress, if she planned it, if she made it herself, then I should say the instance is that of a typical project. We have in it a wholehearted purposeful act carried on amid social surroundings. That the

---


dressmaking was purposeful is clear; and the purpose once formed dominated each succeeding step in the process and gave unity to the whole.\textsuperscript{31}

Kilpatrick adds an important component to service-learning project choice and implementation. For a project to succeed educationally, it must originate in the interests and needs of the students. On further analysis, it becomes clear why this is so. Left to traditional notions of learning, educators tell students what projects are worthy of their attention thereby ignoring the "powers and purposes of those taught."\textsuperscript{32} The project becomes contrived and artificial because it disregards the personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities of those who will be tackling the problem in the service situation. In a word, the project lacks the unity of purpose called for by Kilpatrick. Not only must a service-learning project be interactive, social, and continual, it must be driven by a purpose important to the students themselves.

Paul Hanna's contribution to service-learning theory comes from the community side of the service equation and resulted from a groundbreaking survey study entitled \textit{Youth Serves the Community} (1936). This study, commissioned by the Progressive Education Association, reported on a myriad of youth service projects from around the country. As Hanna found, educational service projects (as advocated by Kilpatrick) necessarily change the surrounding community: the community is remade in important ways. For Hanna, the "significant social value criteria" was as important as the "individual education criteria." He argued that a successful project has to be not only educational, but also must have the following community characteristics:

1. Any project must culminate in the actual improvement of living in the community. 2. Projects must clearly be an obligation of youth as well as

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{32} Dewey, \textit{Experience and Education}, 42.
adulthood. 3. In so far as possible, projects must get at the basic problems of improving social welfare.

As Hanna maintained, if institutional education is to be a part of the community, not marked off from it, it has certain obligations to that community, and vice-versa. Service-learning projects, when developed without this understanding, quickly become artificial and antithetical to the experiential theory ascribed to here. Service project interaction of individual and community is done with the goals of remaking the individuals involved and of remaking the entire community. In community reconstruction the project becomes the authentic, interactive, reconnecting, and educationally sound practice called for by democratic community education as inherently experiential.

Contemporary Experiential Theory: David Kolb

Progressive educators such as James, Dewey, Kilpatrick and Hanna provide a solid foundation upon which to base a variety of experiential educational approaches; and, as is noted above, these thinkers are often (and correctly) relied upon to ground service-learning practice. Many service-learning advocates, however, have turned to more contemporary thinkers to guide service-learning educational activities. Of particular importance is the relatively recent work of David Kolb. Kolb develops a brand of Deweyan progressivism in his widely read work, *Experiential Learning*, from which many current service-learning models come. Kolb contributes positively to experiential

---


theory; on the other hand, there is an aspect of his notion of experiential learning that brings back an old problem—one that must be brought to light so that service-learning practice based on his work can be made sound.

In the introduction to *Experiential Learning*, Kolb credits Dewey as "the most influential educational theorist of the twentieth century, that best articulates the guiding principles for programs of experiential learning." His book is, to a great extent, a reprise of Dewey's thought. In summarizing his position as it relates to Dewey, Kolb defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." He explains that this definition emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process as viewed from the experiential perspective. First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second is that knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa.

This, in summary form, is the position ascribed to in this study and comes directly from the work of John Dewey. In so far as Kolb revisits and re-examines the work of Dewey, and adds a contemporary readability to its substance, his work is an important addition to experiential theory.


36 Ibid., 38.

37 Ibid., 38.
However, Kolb expands upon the foundational work of earlier progressive philosophers and develops a model that takes into account contemporary research on learning styles and brain function. In particular, Kolb combines Dewey's experiential philosophy with learning style differences indicated by current work on right/left brain functioning. In this expansion of existing theory, Kolb introduces a different way of describing the thinking process that emphasizes learning styles associated with either right- or left-brain dominance. He argues that adding contemporary brain research to experiential learning theory makes that theory stronger for driving educational practice.

At first glance, the addition of contemporary brain research to progressive theory is a positive development. Incorporating new science into established theory is crucial to growth in understanding. However, upon further thinking, Kolb's re-writing of experiential theory in light of new findings brings with it an old problem: it re-establishes a dualism in epistemological/learning theory. He wants educators to view learning as an "either-orness" of thinking or feeling, concrete experience or abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation or reflective observation, rather than as the integrated process that Dewey explicated in How We Think. Kolb describes thinking as

the making use of two dialectically opposed adaptive orientations . . . representing two different and opposed processes of grasping or taking hold of experience in the world--either through reliance on conceptual interpretation and symbolic representation, or through reliance on the tangible, felt qualities of immediate experience.

---

38 Ibid., 49.


40 Kolb, Experiential Education, 41.
Dewey, on the other hand, describes thinking and learning as a "train or chain" in which each successive step is associated intimately with previous and future steps—a complicated, often meandering, process of mental movement coming out of experienced problems and ultimately returning to it with solutions. Kolb, in his discussion, limits the understanding of that process. He describes the experiential learning process as including only specific either/or ways of subject/object interaction. This rendering of experiential learning theory brings naïve simplicity to understanding the thinking (and, therefore, the learning) process—a simplicity that divides the thinking process and develops dualisms similar to those found in traditional epistemological theory. The consequence of Kolb's expansion of progressive thought is a return to understanding thinking and learning as an "either-or" project. Practice based on this extension of progressive thought has the danger of dividing rather than reconnecting those involved, as learners are grouped according to Kolb's "dialectically opposed" ways of knowing and modes of subject/object interaction are compartmentalized and divided. This view of experiential education is far too often relied upon in service-learning theory and one that is damaging to its successful practice as a reconnecting democratic educational reform.

**Consequences for Practice**

The experiential position outlined in this chapter has several important consequences for service-learning practice. First and foremost, a service-learning teacher must conduct herself much differently than one in a traditional classroom practicing from a traditional theoretical position. The service-learning teacher is an experiential guide for her students, not a provider of already formulated knowledge. As such, she has

---

41 This process will be fully explained in the next chapter.
to have an understanding of the capacities, interests, and learning styles of her students while guiding them through and to problems that come out of their experiences. If, as Kilpatrick and Dewey argued, the experience is not purposeful in character, it will be artificial, inauthentic and, therefore, not educational.

Secondly, project authenticity (a real, experienced problem) as required in service-learning theory means that a service-learning teacher has to understand the intimate and necessary relationship between experience and education as described by John Dewey. Individual, private, competitive notions of learning found in traditional classrooms do not take into account either the social or objective interaction called for by service-learning theory. A service-learning project must provide students with the opportunity to work with fellow students and "strangers" while manipulating the objects that are part of the project problem. Only in this kind of subject and object manipulation can both social disposition (found in the concepts of mutuality and solidarity) and academic knowledge and skill grow with the student. Service-learning practitioners educate the total person--social sensibility and academic ability--through authentic projects solving authentic problems. Through just this type of social and object interaction, community problems are solved, knowledge is constructed, and ultimately, selves are created.

A third consequence of viewing service-learning as experiential is the integration of school and community. The interaction of community "strangers" in service-learning projects provides opportunities to both educate and solve community problems. Service-learning projects can and should connect the school to the broader community. In this way, schools can avoid being "marked off" from other community institutions and be a
vital part of democratic life. Paul Hanna makes clear, as is shown above, that community impact must be an essential consideration for service projects. Lacking that impact, projects become inauthentic and fall outside the concept developed here of experiential learning. This demand entails the grooming of relationships among school administrators, teachers and community leaders that do not normally exist in traditional school settings.

Finally, as John Dewey argued, experience should be seen as both the aim and method of education.\(^42\) As such, service projects should be designed with future experiences in mind. That is, service-learning teachers must orchestrate projects so that students are open to future such problem solving activities. Growth is a process directed to the future. Educational growth means successfully moving onto more difficult problems/projects. Projects, therefore, should match the ability and maturity levels of the students involved. If they are not designed with this in mind, future service project work may be restricted rather than expanded.

The service-learning educator has a difficult task--one that is much more demanding than that called for in traditional notions of teaching, and one that is much more rewarding as well. The service-learning educator can accomplish her difficult task only by stepping outside traditional notions to an understanding that good education is an experiential process and that good teaching means guiding students through those problematic experiences important to them now. The service concept, when viewed as it is in Chapter 3 of this study and combined with a view of education as experiential in nature, is an incredibly powerful pedagogy capable of re-connecting democratic citizens

\[^42\] Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 89-91.
while educating them for successful democratic problem-solution. Understanding service and experiential learning are both important steps to successful practice. The two, however, are held together by a third component necessary for service-learning education: reflective thinking. Without a complete understanding of reflection in educational practice, service and learning will remain disconnected and, therefore, incomplete. Reflective thinking is the tie that binds community service to experiential learning and is the next concept that must be clarified.
CHAPTER 5
REFLECTION: THE TIE THAT BINDS EDUCATION AND SERVICE

In an article advocating the use of reflection maps in service-learning, Janet Eyler argues,

Reflection is the hyphen in service-learning; it is the process that helps students connect what they observe and experience in the community with their academic study. In a reflective service-learning class, students are engaged in worthwhile activity in the community, observe, make sense of their observations, ask new questions, relate what they are observing to what they are studying in class, form theories and plans of action, and try out their ideas.1

Service-learning advocates have long understood that reflection is the component that connects service activity with academics.2 The interaction of the two provides students with the opportunity to construct knowledge. Service, when viewed as it is in chapter 3 of this study, (re)connects strangers in a democratic society. Experiential learning theory reminds service-learning educators that there is an intimate relationship between student experience and classroom study; however, without the connection provided by reflection, service and learning remain separate and, therefore, weak concepts for driving educational practice. Eyler says, “In practice it is critical reflection . . . that provides the


transformative link between the action of serving and the ideas and understanding of learning.”

3 Only through the correct understanding of reflection and its relationship to both service and academics can service-learning be educational at all. Without a clear understanding of reflection, service-learning practice crumbles into volunteerism void of any educational value.

4 Unfortunately, as has been long recognized as well, reflection is commonly the weakest component of a service-learning project. Eyler notes that the most important component of a high-quality program is frequent attention to the reflective process. And while service itself has a positive effect on personal development, if the objectives of service-learning include such cognitive goals as deeper understanding of subject matter, critical thinking, and perspective transformation, intensive and continuous reflection is necessary; little change is produced by classes that have community service as an add-on poorly integrated into the course. Unfortunately, minimal or sporadic attempts to integrate service into the course are fairly typical of service-learning classes.

Eyler’s assertion that reflection is commonly ignored or misunderstood in service-learning is supported by at least one quantitative study that found that only 4% of the


4 See Chapter 3 of this study for a discussion of the conceptual pitfalls of volunteerism.


6 Eyler, “Reflection Map,” 35.
service-learning projects investigated encouraged reflective discourse between service recipients and providers; even fewer of the projects (1%) actually implemented such reflective activity.\textsuperscript{7}

What happens all too often in service-learning projects, then, is the understanding that reflection is paramount to success and, at the same time, a disinclination to implement structured reflective activities into service-learning projects. An important question is begged: why is reflection ignored in service-learning practice? The disconnection between belief and practice has a two-fold cause. Firstly, as Boud, Keough, and Walker argue,

\begin{quote}
The activity of reflection is so familiar that, as teachers or trainers, we often overlook it in formal learning settings, and make assumptions about the fact that not only is it occurring, but it is occurring effectively for everyone in the group. It is easy to neglect as it is something which we cannot directly observe and which is unique to each learner.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

Secondly, the fact that human beings come into the world able to reflect on a limited, instinctual level leads to the unfounded belief that no further training in how to reflect is necessary. As Boud, Keough, and Walker describe it,

\begin{quote}
The basic reflective and puzzling techniques that help us make sense of everyday life form the core of the very same techniques that enable students to derive meaningful learning from the experience of service; [however,] it is the critical questioning of why things are and the attempt to fully understand the root causes of observable events and behaviors [that must be taught]. This depth of critical reflection grows out of the instinctual reflective process but must be cultivated\textsuperscript{8}.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{7} Maybach, \textit{Second Year Evaluation}.

\textsuperscript{8} Boud, Keough, and Walker, “Promoting Reflection,” 8.
\end{footnotes}
purposefully as a habit of the mind.  

Patrick Whitaker has observed that by the time children are of school-age, “they have exercised their huge learning potential in myriad ways to become sturdy individuals, with the skill of adaptation, self-management and communication already well established.” All of these critics agree that all too often students are assumed to have critical, reflective skills and, therefore, structured, reflective instruction and practice is ignored in both planning and implementation of service-learning projects. Quality service-learning simply cannot happen without a clear understanding of what reflection is and how it must be taught, modeled, and practiced. This understanding, therefore, must be actively and consciously incorporated into any service-learning project regardless of the ability or experience that participating students seem to have.

The Relationship Between Service, Academics, and Reflection

The opening paragraphs of this chapter argued that the process of reflection and its relationship to service and academics must be understood for service-learning to succeed. An analysis of reflection makes clear the nature of this necessary relationship. As Eyler, Giles, and Schmeide argue, reflection is “contextual.” Reflection’s contextual nature best explains how academics are connected to service. In service-learning, academic, classroom learning provides an introduction to the skills needed for solving a community problem; the service project is the problematic context in which academic learning is applied and, thereby, learned. This understanding is nothing new--it has been

---


argued throughout this study, particularly in discussions of experiential learning theory and practice. However, only through understanding reflection completely and correctly can students and teachers decide how the academic skills are to be applied to the community problem. Reflection brings academics to the service experience by contemplating the question, “How can classroom learning be applied to transform this particular problematic situation?” A teacher might consider conversely, “How can this problematic situation transform classroom learning?” Without the connection provided through reflective thought, the depth of learning that is hoped for in service-learning simply will not come to pass.

The contextual nature of reflection is explained by the fact that it is the result of a “felt problem.” As such, reflection requires that individuals step back from the problem and construct hypotheses about how academic knowledge/skills might be applied to fix or reconstruct the problem situation. These hypotheses then are tested in the problem situation and judged for success and failure. Only when reflection has each and all of these features can it bring service and academics together to create learning. Only when service-learning practice embraces this very specific relationship among experience, academics, and reflection will it succeed. John Dewey’s notion of reflective thought explains how this necessary relationship must be understood in service-learning practice. John Dewey’s “Reflective Thought”

Humans are born with a rudimentary ability to reflect in a trial and error fashion, and the story of that reflective ability parallels the history of the species. The history of reflection as a concept is long, as well, and can be traced back at least as far as the
However, the more recent work of John Dewey, as pointed out below, most completely explains how reflection should be conceptualized in contemporary service-learning practice:

Dewey (1933) crystallized what many generations of teachers had known and practiced intuitively, namely that there were two kinds of experiential processes which led to learning. The first process was trial and error which led to “rule of thumb” decisions. The value to the learner of this kind of process was limited by the specificity of the problem which was solved and the scope of the trial and error explorations. The second process he identified was reflective activity which involved the perception of relationships, and connections between the parts of an experience. Dewey believed that it was this kind of activity that enabled effective problem-solving to take place and that it improved the effectiveness of learning.

David Cooper writes,

Dewey (1933) presents one of the most durable cases, as Kolb (1984) acknowledges, for the critical primacy of structured reflective thinking in the educative process. Dewey argues that reflective thinking is both the means and end that should be cultivated by education, properly considered.

Certainly, John Dewey is not the only educational philosopher to map out the workings of reflection and thought. As was explained in Chapter 2, though service-learning like practices have been around for more than a century, service-learning as a specific educational philosophy has been in existence only since the early 1970s. In the last 35 years, much has been written about what reflection is and how it should be practiced. One often-cited example is found in the work of David Kolb. Kolb is helpful

---


in reminding readers what Dewey said about the process of reflection and, therefore, of learning. However, as one critic correctly laments,

Kolb does not discuss the nature of his stage of observation and reflection in much detail. His scheme has been useful in assisting us in planning learning activities and in helping us check simply that learners can be effectively engaged by the tasks we have set. It does not help, however, to uncover the elements of reflection itself.\(^{15}\)

Kolb is one prominent proponent of service-learning among many who have attempted to map out the reflective process; and yet, they are all more or less indebted to the work of Dewey.\(^{16}\) Clearly Dewey’s understanding of reflection best explains how reflection can bring classroom academics and a service project together to promote learning. Unraveling Dewey’s idea of reflective thought thus is the first step toward the successful practice of reflection in service-learning.

**The Features of Reflection**

John Dewey argued that thinking could be understood in several different ways. It is first discernable as conscious thought that, try as we may, we cannot stop. William James described thinking of this kind as the “flights and perchings” of consciousness.\(^ {17}\) Thought also is found in fancy and imagination. Story making falls into this second category and is characterized not by the quest for knowledge or problem solution, but as

\(^{15}\) Boud, Keough, and Walker, “Promoting Reflection,” 14.


\(^{17}\) William James, *Psychology: the Briefer Course* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 27.
an emotive expression that has as its goal an interesting plot or surprising climax. A third kind of thought Dewey called belief, a type of thought that is built up through “tradition, instruction, [and] imitation.” Belief is based on “prejudgments,” not on examinations of evidence. Finally, Dewey talked of formal, scientific thinking. This formal, problem-oriented, thought he called “reflective thought.” Reflective thought is “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.” Reflective thinking is what Dewey was most concerned with, and reflective thinking, as Dewey described it, brings service-learning projects and academic, classroom skills together to create learning situations.

Dewey provided contemporary service-learning educators with a clear foundation for practicing reflection. He explained that reflective thought has specific features that can be understood by disentangling them conceptually from the actual process:

So much for the general features of a reflective experience. They are (i) perplexity, confusion, doubt, due to the fact that one is implicated in an incomplete situation whose full character is not yet determined; (ii) a conjectural anticipation--a tentative interpretation of the given elements, attributing to them a tendency to effect certain consequences; (iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) of all attainable consideration which will define and clarify the problem in hand; (iv) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent, because squaring with a wider range of facts; (v) taking one stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action which is applied to the existing state of affairs: doing something overtly to bring about the anticipated result, and thereby testing the hypothesis.20

---

18 Dewey, How We Think: A Restatement, 7.

19 Ibid., 5.

Dewey’s conceptual outline of reflection must not be viewed as a regulated, four- or five-step program, or stop and go cycle, which lead to reflective perfection. Numerous writers who support service-learning particularly, and experiential learning generally, seem to forget that Dewey’s discussion is a means to understand what is in reality an intricate process. To “view” the process is to see complicated meanderings from problem, to hypothesis, to past experience, to testing, and back and forth. That means that individual students may be at different reflective “places,” doing somewhat different things, at different times. Though this makes a teacher’s work even more complicated, it is the nature of reflective thought.

“Felt Problems” as Catalysts to Reflection

The initiating cause is the first feature of reflective thought that must be understood in service-learning education. Reflective thought comes about because an experience causes a “state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty” in individual students. As was argued in both Chapters 3 and 4 of this study, service-learning particularly and education generally must be driven by “felt problems” in student experience. Why student interest and purpose are essential to service-learning becomes acutely clear when one looks into exactly what reflection entails. Reflective thought occurs only when a truly felt problem (one vitally important enough to cause perplexing uneasiness) is “discovered,” “found,” “stumbled upon,” or “lead to.” If a problem does not come out of student experience, if it is fabricated by another, or is not genuinely felt

---


22 Dewey, How We Think: A Restatement, 12.
by the student, there will be no catalyst to reflection. And without reflection, no contextual connections are made between classroom learning and the experience itself: learning does not occur.

For service-learning practice to be successful, the emotive nature of problems, both as catalysts and aims of reflection, must be understood as well. The realization of a problem comes about as an affective, rather than a cognitive, “feeling” that something is amiss. In an article defending Dewey’s view of emotion in problem discovery, Robert Sherman reminds his readers that

The fact of the matter is that we do have such feelings. (Though we may suppress them and not recognize that they are a motive to thought.) We are 
\textit{surprised} or \textit{intrigued} or \textit{revolted} or \textit{eled} by experiences. \textit{We like} the recommendations that one essayist has, or \textit{dislike} the proposals put forward by some legislator. Our “guts” are tense, our heads ache, we pace the floor, and our voices rise. These all are indications that we have an “interest” in the matters at hand. Alas, instead of using these as a motive to thought, to exploit the interests, we suppress the feelings; we believe they are in competition with thought and always should be judged the loser.\textsuperscript{23}

This affective character of the reflective process is precisely what Dewey meant when he described the initiating stage of thought as “a felt difficulty”:

\begin{quote}
The difficulty may be \textit{felt} with sufficient definiteness as to set the mind at once speculating upon its probable solution, or an undefined \textit{uneasiness} and \textit{shock} may come first, leading only later to definite attempt to find out what is the matter.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Service-learning teachers must understand that projects, to be successful, can come only from a direct emotional attachment to the service problem on the part of the students. In this way, the service itself, through reflective connection to academic study, can

\textsuperscript{23} Robert Sherman, “Philosophy With Guts,” \textit{Journal of Thought} 20 (Summer, 1985): 7; Sherman’s emphasis.

accomplish educationally sound aims. Without that emotional attachment, there is no problem to be solved and no context for the application of academic, classroom-acquired skills.

Not only does the affective realization of a problem initiate thought, it also necessarily drives the entire reflective process. Because the initiator of thought is a perplexity, or incompleteness in experience, the goal of reflection is the closing of that uneasiness, a reconstruction of the experience that brings wholeness to it once again. As Dewey argued, “The two limits of every unit of thinking are a perplexed, troubled, or confused situation at the beginning and a cleared-up, unified, resolved situation at the close.”

Reflective scrutiny, when driven by student interest and purpose, demands the application of classroom academics to resolve the felt service-project problem.

In bringing academic skills learned in the classroom to the service project, purposeful activity (such as advocated by William Kilpatrick) in the form of knowledge and skills are brought to a genuinely felt problem in a student’s experience. In this way, the particular knowledge and skills are practiced, honed, and critiqued for success and adjustment within the service project activity. The service project experience and academic learning are bound together intimately through reflection by asking and answering such questions as “what can be done together, using the skills learned in this classroom within this school, to solve this important community problem?” The result is the reinforcement in experience of academic learning as well as the formation of participatory, democratic habits.

---

25 Dewey, How We Think: A Restatement, 106.
The Mediation of a “Felt Problem”

As an emotional, affective activity, problem detection is no more a reflective feature than the instinctual, involuntary reactions of beasts. If humans simply felt and immediately reacted, they would be as any creature on earth, acting simply on instinct. However, the second, third, and fourth of Dewey’s “features of reflective thought” replace instinctual reaction with thoughtful mediation:

To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found.26

This reflective patience is the most important feature of reflection and the most essential to teach students participating in a service-learning project. The mediating feature of reflection is where reasoning proper occurs and where answers to the question, “what can we do to solve this community problem?,” are initially considered. This stepping back and away from the situation is necessary to the reflective process. Avoidance of snap, or unreasoned, or reactionary attempts to solve problems is the hallmark of reflection. Mediation is what distinguishes reflective thought from instinctual reaction.

While mediating a problem, plans for problem solution are turned over in the mind, discussed, and hypotheses are formed:

The object of thinking is to help reach a conclusion, to project a possible termination on the basis of what is already given. Certain other facts about thinking accompany this feature. Since the situation in which thinking occurs is a doubtful one, thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating.27

26 Ibid., 16.

27 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 152.
The ultimate goal of problem mediation is to develop an hypothesis that, once applied, will bring a reconstruction of the situation to make it complete and satisfying once again. That is, mediation as a reflective feature provides the time and consideration to develop academic solutions to the service problem.

**Reflection After Mediation: Hypothesis Testing**

Testing hypotheses involves two important steps. Initially, hypotheses are formulated and go through a “mental testing.” Through this mental testing, possible consequences are considered for each plan and those that are found lacking in one way or another, are discarded. Once one hypotheses or plan is chosen, it must go through a second, decisive stage of testing. This second stage of testing the hypotheses is accomplished through application to the project problem and makes experience (as is maintained in the previous chapter of this study) both the means and aim of service-learning education. That is, to be educative, service-learning must begin and end with student experience. If it does not, then the purposeful nature of student interest will not drive learning. This process entails that hypotheses or ideas about how best to solve a felt problem must be tested in student experience. In describing this feature of reflection, Dewey explained that the

concluding and conclusive step is some kind of experimental corroboration, or verification, of the conjectural idea. Reasoning shows that if the idea be adopted, certain consequences follow. So far the conclusion is hypothetical or conditional. If we look and find the characteristic traits called for by rival alternatives to be lacking, the tendency to believe, to accept, is almost irresistible. If it is found that the experimental results agree with the theoretical, or rationally deduced, results, and if there is reason believe that only the conditions in question would yield such results, the confirmation is so strong as to induce a conclusion.\(^{28}\)

---

In the particular case of service-learning, reasoned “guesses” about how to transform the community problem are applied and then evaluated for their success or failure. The community problem is then reevaluated and the process continues until reconstruction brings back the initially lost equilibrium. Again, this feature is necessary to foster learning. The hypothesis-testing feature of reflective thought shows the involved students exactly how their hypotheses worked out. Learning in and by experience occurs in testing these reasoned hypotheses and academic skills learned in theory become experientially real.

Reflection: A Continual Component of Service-Learning Projects

As Eyler says and Dewey implied, reflection must be a continual component of any service-learning project. Reflection, as explained by Dewey, is an unending cycling from experience to mediation to testing to experience that cannot be ignored before, during, or after a service project. Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede make clear that “reflection should maintain an especially coherent continuity over the course of each [service] event or experience. Continuous reflection includes reflection before the experience, during the experience and after the experience.”29 James and Pamela Tool write that “although the literal definition of reflection means ‘looking backward,’ reflection occurs at every phase of the service-learning cycle: reflection to prepare for service, reflection during action, and reflection upon action.”30 Exactly how reflection can and should be maintained before, during, and after service projects is a crucial issue to the success of service-learning--one that often is ignored or left only for post-service activities.

---

29 Eyler, Giles, Schmiede, Practitioner’s Guide, 17

30 Toole and Toole, Reflection as a Tool, 102.
**Reflection Before Practice: “Preflection”**

According to Diane Falk, “preflection” is the reflective preparation that occurs before the actual service project begins. Keogh, Boud, and Walker point out that during preflection, “students start to explore what is required of them, what are the demands of the field setting and the resources which they themselves have to bring.”

Preflection provides the opportunity for students to imagine what the experience will be like and to express concerns related to the project. It is a concept that reminds service-learning educators that reflection must be continual and adds to Dewey’s analysis of reflection by indicating the preparation needed, both emotionally and cognitively, to engage in problem solving service.

However, preparatory reflection as described above is missing an essential Deweyan element: student involvement in project choice. Boud, Keough, and Walker assume that a project already has been chosen without input from the very students who will carry out the project. This assumption is a serious flaw in reflective theory. For students to involve themselves in a project whole-heartedly and with purpose and interest, the project absolutely must come out of the felt interests of those students. The feeling of a crucial community problem is, as argued above, the catalyst to reflection and, therefore, must genuinely be “felt” to create a learning situation. That felt interest must be part of the “preflective” stage of project reflection. Without that feature, preflection may be harmful rather than helpful to reflective practice in a service-learning project.

---


33 Falk, “Preflection,” 23.
Combining Deweyan felt interest with the preparatory character of preflection, makes it a complete and helpful notion to reflective theory and, therefore, to service-learning practice.

James and Pamela Toole elaborate this common shortcoming in reflective theory when they explain their view of project preparation:

Reflection before service may seem a contradiction, but we commonly reflect on and use prior knowledge and experience when we plan and design any project. In preparing for service work, students recollect, propose, hypothesize, build models, predict and make judgments. Students reflect when they choose a service project (What do we wish were different in our community?); when they clarify project goals and action plans (What do we want to see happen?); and when they prepare for the service itself (How do we feel about participating in this project?).

The point cannot be overstated: the “preflective” stage of reflection must include project choice, planning, and rationale or else the project will be doomed from the beginning. If the students do not choose the project out of a felt interest, then it will suffer from the artificiality found in traditional educational approaches.

Dewey was also clear to say that reflection, as described here, does not imply leaving students to their own means hoping they stumble upon a problem of interest. What preflection does entail is a reformulation of the teacher’s role. Instead of being a purveyor of already established knowledge or a teller of problems, a teacher must be a guide who leads students to realize problematic situations. The leading of students to problems in experience is not an easy task. The service-learning teacher might use traditional modes of teaching (the reading of great works and contemporary literature, for example) as well as more non-traditional practices, including going into one’s community.

---

34 Toole and Toole, Reflection as a Tool, 105. Emphasis theirs.

to see firsthand what is happening. Interacting with the community entails meeting community strangers and talking to them about community issues. It also means that student experience is the source of project choice. As Boud, Keogh and Walker remind the service-learning educator,

> Only learners themselves can learn and only they can reflect on their own experiences. Teachers can intervene in various ways to assist, but they only have access to individuals’ thoughts and feelings through what individuals choose to reveal about themselves.\(^{36}\)

In addition to project choice and interest, preflection must be a time for project preparation as well. Once the students discover a problem, the reflective process is in full swing. The process will naturally incorporate previous experience and, more importantly, indicate lack of previous experience. This will be particularly true when students meet community “strangers”—those fellow citizens who have first-hand knowledge of the realized problem. The preflective stage, as is pointed out above, must include expressions of emotions and clarifying of assumptions about the problem and about those citizens who regularly experience that problem. It will involve some guessing as to outcomes, roles, and further problems. Preflection will, in short, be the catalyst or, as Dewey says, “the steadying and guiding factor” for the project.\(^{37}\)

**Reflection During Service**

Reflection is an ongoing process and though preparatory reflection (“preflection”) is essential to project implementation, much, if not most, reflective thought in service-learning occurs during the project work. Reflection during the project drives academic learning as the hypotheses developed for solving the project problem are tested, adjusted

---

\(^{36}\) Boud, Keough, and Walker, “Promoting Reflection,” 11.

through further data gathering, re-applied, and re-tested. Reflection provides the opportunity for learning by bringing the service problem and classroom together in the context of the project. Applying classroom learning in the project context “teaches” academic understanding well beyond traditional classroom settings because the students use classroom-constructed knowledge and skills to solve real problems. Students, side by side with community members who have a stake in the service problem, make project decisions. Students operating in the project context create knowledge and sharpen academic skills as they solve present and future community problems. The project context also leads to better reflective skills as students make project decisions and test those decisions for success or failure.

Service-learning calls for continual reflection that not only develops academic/reflective skills, but connects disparate community groups as well. That is, service, understood as it is in Chapter 3 of this study, is an interactive experience. In that earlier chapter, it was argued that too often the “served” are not consulted prior to or during project work. In order that community connections are created, as called for in the concept of service, reflective activities must involve all stakeholders. In particular, students and affected community members must discuss project decisions and effects through structured reflection. Only in interactive, structured reflection are good project decisions made and democratic connections maintained. Clearly this is another important way that reflection, when understood and practiced correctly, connects academics to community service by including all interested parties in meaningful, democratic dialogue.
The reflective dialogue called for in service-learning will bind students and community members, academics and experience only if it is structured with both cognitive and affective goals in mind. Boud, Keough and Walker argue that reflection as we have described it is pursued with intent. It is not idle meanderings or day-dreaming, but purposive activity directed towards a goal. This is not to say that it may not be helpful to have periods of reverie and mediation associated with conscious reflection, but in themselves these activities are not what we are referring to when we discuss goal-directed critical reflection.

The reflective process is a complex one in which both feelings and cognition are closely interrelated and interactive. Negative feelings, particularly about oneself, can form major barriers towards learning. They can distort perceptions, lead to false interpretations of events, and can undermine the will to persist. Positive feelings and emotions can greatly enhance the learning process; they can keep the learner on the task and can provide a stimulus for new learning. The affective dimension has to be taken into account when we are engaged in our own learning activities, and when we are assisting others in this process.38

Clearly, the idea that reflection is easy, or at least instinctual, is a misperception. The reflective process, as it is embraced here, must be continual and must be taught by modeling and structuring it with specific goals in mind.

The actual form that continual project reflection takes can and should vary according to student interest and levels of development. Eyler, Giles, and Schmeide argue that in order to take advantage of differing learning styles, a wide variety of reflective approaches including directed discussion, journaling, oral presentations, and role-playing should be used.39 The Pennsylvania Institute for Environmental and Community Service Learning advocates reflection that is structured around four modes of

---

38 Boud, Keough, and Walker, “Promoting Reflection,” 11.

communication: “reading, writing, talking, and observing objects.”

James and Pamela Tool suggest the use of the “what; so what? Now what?” cycle based on the work of David Kolb. These structured forms of reflection, as well as others, can be successful, but only if the features of the reflective process discussed here are carried through each reflective experience. Reflection must be driven by the essential goal of any service-learning project: to reconstruct the situation to bring a resolution to the felt problem. Reflection guided by this idea will promote both cognitive and emotional learning during the project, as adjustments are discussed and made in order to form better hypotheses and, therefore, more complete learning.

Post Project Reflection: A Continuation, Not a Culmination

Reflection means “looking back,” so it is most commonly practiced when projects are over. As James and Pamela Tool remark, “In the aftermath of a project, students therefore need to formally reflect in order to evaluate the project, assess their own development, look for generalizations to guide future decision making and find ‘new applications’ for what they have learned.”

In the case of American education, reflection more often than not is seen as an end to the particular project and as a culmination of a semester or year-long course. Certainly it is crucial that reflective discourse carry into the post-project period. However, seeing post-project reflection as the final act in the project context is clearly a misunderstanding of Deweyan reflective features as discussed

---


41 Toole and Toole, Reflection as a Tool, 104. David Kolb, Experiential Learning.

42 Toole and Toole, Reflection as a Tool, 107.
in the earlier pages of this chapter. Instead of the project ending when the service-learning course ends, reflective practice (when understood correctly) requires that the project problem be re-examined by all stakeholders, together. In this way, democratic interaction and evaluation is practiced and encouraged, and project success is evaluated through continuing reflection.

The reflective post-project examination will determine the successes and failures of the problem solutions. The post-project evaluation also will indicate future and related problems with the project context or in similar contexts. Project activities must, therefore, be constructed and implemented based on the idea that the project is over only when a satisfactory reconstruction of, or solution to, the problem has been achieved. Until that time, the project will continue in new and different ways, with new and different insights. Post-project reflection is simply another case of stepping back from the situation to see the degree to which project activities have solved the initial problem. It is a time for bringing together both project impact and learning with an eye to future similar experiences.

On an individual basis, Deweyan theory, as well as the community service structure advocated here, asks each student involved in the project to continue reflecting on the problem situation. These concepts require that upon ending the course, graduating, or moving on in some other way, students take both the general reflective skills and the knowledge of the particular community problem with them. It also asks them to apply those skills to similar community situations. In this way, the reflective cycle generally and the problem situation particularly lead to similar work in the individual’s later experience. Service-learning done well will create continuity through
opening new and related experiences from those of the past, and in so doing the involved students continue to grow.

Reflective Practice: A Note on Specific Activities

There is a tendency among service-learning advocates to regard reflection as simply “fun” activities that allow students to look back in celebration at what their service project has completed. In fact, grant recipients are encouraged to include celebratory activities following the completion of a project that often look reflective in nature. However, reflection, understood as it is presented in this chapter is a serious activity without which service-learning will not work at all. Volumes have been published listing activities for reflection and commenting on the value of such activities. Suggested activities are wide and varied in both structure and degrees of success. Group discussion, role-playing, writing, acting, presenting, and debating activities all might lead to good reflective practice.

These activities, however, do not, in and of themselves, satisfy the reflective requirement suggested here for service-learning education. The success of each such activity will be found in whether or not it leads the student to reflecting in the manner described above. Does the activity lead students to see a problem in their experience? Does the activity make students step back from a problem to plan a solution? Does the activity get students to apply their academic learning to possible solutions? Does the

---

43 Learn and Serve Florida, 2002 Request for Proposals.

activity lead students to test that plan in the problem situation? Does the activity bring students to a reevaluation of the problem situation and those similar to it? Does the activity involve dialogue among all stakeholders? Does the activity encourage further reflection? Regardless of what the reflective activity specifically entails, if it is not structured in such a way to answer the above questions in the affirmative, then it is not reflective in nature and cannot be a part of service-learning education.

Consequences for Practice

Reflective practice, as is argued initially in this chapter, is the tie that binds service activity to academics in a service-learning project. Reflection gives students the opportunity to apply classroom learning in a meaningful community project. This application of knowledge to experience leads to learning that goes well beyond traditional educational practices. Not only are academic skills sharpened, but democratic notions of community and connection are developed as well. As such, reflective theory has clear consequences for service-learning practice. Foremost among them is the consequence such understanding has for the role of the teacher.

Reflection strengthens the notion that a teacher’s role in service-learning is not to give information and expect students simply to repeat it on a test. Instead, service-learning is student-centered, and the teacher’s roles are as guide, mentor, and model. In the role of guide, the teacher has the job of leading students (because of her greater depth and breadth of experience) to and through troubling experiences, thereby aiding in the construction of new knowledge. Such a teacher must be open minded and diligent in the

face of difficult and disquieting questions that might cause student doubt and challenge deeply held beliefs.

As a mentor, a teacher must work intimately with her students as they deal with their own personal challenges as well as the challenges brought by project implementation. The service-learning teacher has to maintain the difficult balancing act of being both mentor and participant. She cannot, as is the case so often in traditional classrooms, separate herself from what the students are doing. She also must understand how reflective practice works and the impact it can have on student development. She must teach students how to reflect by structuring and participating in activities that will give them the opportunity to use their reflective, academic, and social skills in experience. In this way, she will be able to see her students through academic and dispositional learning that comes out of student experience and leads back to it. The teacher always must keep in mind that in service-learning education, she is a model relied on for developing reflective thought. She must, therefore, model and make clear how reflection works through continually practicing reflection when interacting with both students and community members.

Reflection has clear consequences for participants in public education as well. Reflective thought is above all else a problem solving activity. Felt problems on the part of students are rarely, if ever, confined to the school walls. Student problems are community problems and, therefore, demand the participation of the entire community if they are to be solved. Reflective theory requires that a dialogue occur among all community stakeholders and that all stakeholders understand their role in solving the
problem. Only through broad reflective dialogue and action can service-learning be the reconnecting community practice that is called for in theory.

Finally, reflection in service-learning has consequences for the way academic gains should be measured. Experience rather than abstraction becomes the source of academic/cognitive and affective/emotional learning. However, it is only through reflecting on that experience in a structured manner that experiential learning can be retained and transferred to similar experiences. Student experience, as Dewey argued, are both the means and aims of education. Service-learning education is no exception. Only by mediating and reflecting on that experience can students become better equipped to deal with present and future problem situations. Reflection reminds educators that learning is not simply a matter of mastering information, but involves the use of cognitive skills attained in service-learning. That idea must be kept at the forefront of any evaluation of student progress.

The connection that reflection provides between community experience and formal education as advocated in this study could become the model for both K-12 and higher education in this country. This service-learning model requires the reassessment of teacher and student roles, community relationships, and community participation. This reassessment could very well improve how education is practiced and could lead to a more informed and participatory public and, ultimately, a stronger democracy. The current trend in education is moving further away from what is called for in service-learning, as high stakes testing attached to federal and state funding close in the school community and ask for information regurgitation rather than the deeper understanding

45 Dewey, Experience and Education, 89-91.
that comes with reflection as understood here. To convince policy makers that service-
learning has such potential, the aims and goals of the model must be clearly understood
and critically evaluated. Only through understanding these aims can the policy changes
called for here be understood implemented. That is the next step this study will take.
CHAPTER 6
THE AIMS OF SERVICE-LEARNING EDUCATION

Early in this study, philosophic method was described as “the criticism, clarification, and analysis of the language, concepts, and logic of the ends and means of human experience.”¹ Chapters previous to this one have subjected the means of service-learning education (service, experiential education, and reflection) to critical philosophical analysis with the goal of conceptual clarity. Conceptual clarity, it has been argued here, is necessary for successful service-learning practice. The guiding question for the foregoing discussions has been, “How should service-learning practice be conceived for it to succeed as an educational reform plan?” Though numerous aims of service-learning education have been mentioned and at times briefly explained, they have not been the focus of discussion. The present chapter shifts the critical focus from service-learning means, to service-learning aims. It will answer the second philosophically necessary question, “What educational and community goals are entailed in service-learning when its practice is understood as it is in this study?”

Establishing and clarifying educational aims is an essential philosophical task. Richard Millard, Jr. and Peter Bertocci argue,

Every educational system or body of educational practices does involve some set of ends or aims felt to be of sufficient importance or value to be perpetuated, or

strengthened, or created in individuals and the community by the particular education as such. Without these, no education would, in fact, occur.²

Clarifying specific educational aims is difficult without the discussion spiraling uncontrollably to broader philosophical issues. As Henry Perkins has pointed out, public education in the United States regularly has been called on to solve any and all perceived social problems.³ Because of this institutional importance to American democracy, determining what aims are appropriate to public education can lead to the consideration of broad philosophical and social questions. Susanne Langer explains that determining educational aims cannot but draw in vast further questions of the aims of human societies, the ultimate values that set up these aims, our basic ideals of society and individual life. Perused seriously it may lead to entirely new definitions of “society,” “life,” “individual,” “purpose,” “action,” and other terms.⁴

The limited confines of this study, however, call for a focused, narrowly defined discussion of specific service-learning goals, leaving the broader philosophical/social questions for another study.

It is important when clarifying these narrow, specifically defined aims of service-learning to remember that they should not be “assigned” externally to the educational situation. That is, the goals of any educational approach must be entailed in its practice, not put onto its practice from outside of it. Aims, correctly understood, are just as much a part of the experienced educational situation as are the means utilized to meet those aims.


When aims are conceived from outside practice, they become artificial goals that limit, rather than open, possibilities for practice. John Dewey cautioned that establishing educational aims from outside of practice is misguided for several reasons:

They [educational theories] assume ends lying outside our activities; ends foreign to the concrete makeup of the situation; ends which issue from some outside source. Then the problem is to bring our activities to bear upon the realization of these externally supplied ends. They are something for which we ought to act. In any case such "aims" limit intelligence; they are not the expression of mind in foresight, observation, and choice of the better among alternative possibilities. They limit intelligence because, given ready-made, they must be imposed by some authority external to intelligence, leaving to the latter nothing but a mechanical choice of means.\(^5\)

These “Externally supplied ends” cannot adequately guide practice because they lack the “experimental” quality that allows their development in response to the educational situation. A good aim, on the other hand,

surveys the present state of experience of pupils, and forming a tentative plan of treatment, keeps the plan constantly in view and yet modifies it as conditions develop. The aim, in short, is experimental, and hence constantly growing as it is tested in action.\(^6\)

Educational aims, when understood correctly, are not static, rigid, goals-in-themselves; on the contrary, they are flexible means of directing practice. Service-learning aims must be seen in this light if they are to successfully guide service, experiential learning, and reflection.

**Service-learning Aims: a Survey of the Research**

Richard Kraft points out that one “of the major difficulties in evaluating or researching service-learning programs is the lack of agreement on what is meant by the ...
term service learning and exactly what it is meant to accomplish.” Service-learning certainly is in need of more clearly defined aims, and that clarification can be accomplished only when each aspect of its practice is understood conceptually. The particular practices discussed in earlier chapters of this study (service, experiential education, and reflection), imply a particular set of educational aims. As examples of this means and ends relationship, service as explicated in this study implies that students learn democratic values; experiential learning means that students must make use of classroom knowledge; and, finally, reflection requires that students mediate and act on thoughtful decisions.

The aims implied in service-learning practice must be made clear or else implementation will be directionless and, therefore, not educational. One way to initiate the clarifying of aims called for by the present theoretical understanding of service-learning is to survey both qualitative and quantitative research--research efforts that have grown tremendously since Kraft’s observation. Through examining research done on expected outcomes, the aims that proponents are expecting to meet can be organized for more helpful discussion.

Outcomes research conducted on service-learning are broad, various, and recent. A 1993 study concluded that, “The current scarcity of research limits the availability of literature to be reviewed in this [service-learning outcomes] area” and predicted that outcomes research would increase greatly in ensuing years. That growth in research has,


\[8\] Marilyn Smith, “An Assessment of Intended Outcomes and Perceived Effects of
in fact, materialized. Janet Eyler et al. have documented 135 research endeavors on service-learning “effects,” “impacts,” and “outcomes” conducted between the years 1993 and 2000.9 That descriptive list is especially indicative of the great interest in service-learning goals because it is limited to efforts at colleges and universities. The addition of work done at the K-12 level and research completed since 2000 indicates the growing interest in service-learning outcomes and provides a convenient way to categorize expected educational aims.

The first and most obvious category of service-learning aims is academic skills development. No educational approach is acceptable if it does not expect to increase students’ ability to read, write, manipulate numbers, create knowledge, and think critically. These are the constant and classic educational aims. Secondly, service-learning is expected to develop democratic moral character, and there is much research that attempts to describe and/or quantify that aspect of service-learning. Finally, service-learning affects the community by making a school’s students and teachers transformers of community problems. The community impact category is the least researched of the three categories of aims and the most removed from traditional notions of public education.

This rich and growing body of research provides several helpful divisions among the types of outcomes studied and, therefore, the types of outcomes expected in service-

learning education. These outcomes categories, however, are simply a means to understand service-learning aims and do not capture the interactive nature of those aims. That is, aims in each of the three general categories described below continually intertwine one with another in service-learning practice. As students develop their academic skills through applying them to community problems, a variety of educational aims from each and every general category can be met simultaneously.

Outcomes Research: Growth in Academic Skills

Skill development, knowledge construction, and their practical application are such important components of any educational approach that discussing them as aims may seem a waste of time. They are often, particularly in light of recent trends toward testing purely academic outcomes, the only educational aims under critical public scrutiny. The public wants to know that its children are learning to read, write, do arithmetic, master important information, and think critically. Public education is, in fact, often asked to stick to the basics--the three R’s of education--rather than be concerned with producing active citizens and better communities. Service-learning, as an experiential educational approach, is expected by its proponents not only to meet, but exceed other more traditional approaches to teaching academics. It is, therefore, crucial that academic aims in service-learning be clear, else the whole notion of service-learning may be seen as nothing more than the “soft pedagogy” described in Chapter 2 of this study.

Of those research efforts described by Eyler et al., 18 studied the topic of academic growth, measured quantitatively or described qualitatively, ranging from
changes in grade point average (GPA), to depth of course understanding. There also exist several large studies that are not included in Eyler’s list. One of these, a comprehensive study commissioned and financed by an anonymous donor, studied outcomes on eleven different academic measures. States such as Florida continue to sponsor research and collect data related to academic success in service-learning programs. Though this is obviously not an exhaustive account of research done to determine the academic promise of service-learning, it does indicate the interest in establishing skills acquisition, knowledge construction, and their successful application as aims of this potentially powerful pedagogy.

Outcomes Research: Democratic/Ethical Character Development

Democratic character development is an aim that distinguishes service-learning from many other, particularly more traditional, modes of teaching and learning. It is an aim that is often seen as secondary to academic growth. However, it is the most widely researched aim in service-learning education. Everything from diversity sensitivity to spiritual development has been examined as possible outcomes of service-learning. The specific topics of this research include personal development, ability to work with

---

10 Eyler et al., *At A Glance.*


others,\textsuperscript{14} social responsibility,\textsuperscript{15} commitment to service,\textsuperscript{16} and racial sensitivity,\textsuperscript{17} to name a few.

The sheer number of research projects examining character development is a clear indication that it is an important service-learning aim. Service-learning education is expected to develop such broad characteristics as an “ethic of care,” deeper understandings of self, empathy with community “strangers,” as well as the more specific practices related to democratic participation such as participation in democratic debate

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
and voting. Both the general and specific character aims expected in service-learning deserve philosophical attention.

**Outcomes Research: Community Improvement**

The second outcomes area that clearly distinguishes service-learning from more traditional approaches is community improvement. Paul Hanna argued that community transformation must be taken into account because when students and teachers interact with the community in solving problems, the community is changed. Nadinne Cruz and Dwight Giles note that this area of outcomes research (relative to the myriad of academic and character development work mentioned above) lacks both the quantity and quality that is needed to completely understand service-learning’s community impact. That shortcoming in research, however, does not mean that it can be ignored in a conceptual discussion of sound aims for service-learning education.

Though research that describes the means and degree that service-learning transforms a community lacks variety and number in both methodology and findings, it does support the notions that communities are both generally satisfied with service-

---


learning activities and are positively affected. A philosophical discussion of community transformation, such as the one initiated by Paul Hanna will show that community problem solution and improved community-school relations are both reasonable and necessary aims of service-learning education.

**Philosophical Foundations For Service-Learning Aims**

Examining research that attempts to quantify and describe the meeting of educational aims provides a convenient framework for discussing those aims. This framework not only keeps the discussion from the uncontrollable spiral mentioned above, but it also organizes very specific aims (learning mathematical order of operations, for example) into analyzable categories. Several conceptual questions will drive the remainder of this discussion: does each of these broad categories of aims meet the general criteria of being directive yet flexible parts of service-learning education? Are there any specific characteristics within each category that must be emphasized for complete understanding of the aims contained therein? Lastly, and most importantly, are these aims entailed in service-learning practice as explained in the previous chapters of this

---


study? These are the questions that must be considered if the expectations for service-learning education are to be clearly understood.

Reflective, Critical Thinking as a Service-Learning Aim

As is argued in the previous chapter of this study, critical reflection is the impetus for service-learning and is the glue that bonds service activities, classroom academics, and community transformation together in a complete service-learning experience. It is, in fact, reflection, as conceived here, that is the core practice of service-learning educational practice; however, reflection is not simply a means to reach other educational aims. Reflection is an aim in and of itself. Service-learning is designed in part to develop reflective skills and a reflective disposition among all project participants. Reflection is essential as well to each of the three general categories of aims described above. As such, reflective thinking is the overarching aim of service-learning practice. Unfortunately, as also was argued in the previous chapter, it often is the most ignored in service-learning education.

Reflective thinking, as conceived in this study, first and foremost guides human decision-making when a problem in experience is felt. It frees human beings, at any stage of development, from impulse and blind habit. It delays instinct so that a reasonable rather than an un-reasonable action decision might be reached. Ultimately, the purpose of education is to teach humans to make and act on wise decisions--decisions that will make life better for an entire community. Correct service-learning theory will aim to develop these reflective skills as well as the disposition of reflective patience. If they do not accomplish these goals, service-learning projects will fail.

As an academic aim within service-learning, reflective thinking makes possible the application of purely abstract academic learning in creative and useful ways. Without
developing and practicing reflective thinking related to solving a project problem, the problem simply cannot be solved. Nor can academic skills be learned without reflective thinking. The mathematical order of operations, for example, means little to a student until it is applied through the reflective process to a real problem in experience. Service-learning aims to develop reflective reasoning by supplying reflective instruction, modeling and the opportunity to apply solutions deemed valuable through the reflective process. Using academic skills through reflective application creates a much deeper understanding of them on the part of the student. Reflection, viewed as it is in this study, is an important aim entailed within each and every service-learning project as well as a democratic developmental goal important to finding solutions to wider, social problems.

As a democratic/character development goal that has ramifications beyond the specific service-learning project, reflective thinking is equally paramount. The freedom of democracy demands thoughtful decisions and responsible action. Without both the ability and inclination to step back and reflect before acting, unreasonable actions or no action at all may be the result. Without a reflective public, democracy stagnates.23 As will be explained in Chapter 7, service-learning is a democratic form of education and as such must aim to develop democratic practices. Reflection is the core democratic practice and stands as the most important educational aim of service-learning in its relationship to the survival of democracy.24


24 Amy Gutmann explains this at length in Democratic Education (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987)
Finally, there would be no community impact, no community transformation, nor problem solution without reflection as it is conceived in this study. Until a problem solution is tested through thought and action as is explained in Chapter 5, it cannot be evaluated and problems cannot be solved. Problem solution can be accomplished only if developing reflective skills and habits is a continual aim of service-learning practice. As the core aim, it directs service-learning practitioners toward community projects that encourage reflective development. Reflective thinking is clearly an aim that is directive, flexible, and entailed in every step of service-learning education.

**Academic Aims of Service-learning Education**

The category of academic service-learning aims is similar to that found in most, if not all, educational approaches. Educational schemes of every stripe, traditional or progressive, student-centered or test-driven, demand that students learn to read, write, manipulate numbers, have a working knowledge of important facts, and think critically. It is reasonable to expect any and all educational models to have these basic academic aims. What distinguishes service-learning from other educational approaches is the means used to meet those academic goals. Whereas the emphasis in the more traditional notions of education is on memorizing and testing, service-learning emphasizes critical thinking and application of skills in authentic experiential contexts: academic skills learned in the classroom are strengthened through applying them to problems in the community. Reflective thinking guides the application of academic skills to solve the community problem. In this way, academic lessons become vitally important tools to the students and are, therefore, more deeply valued and understood.

When academics are used to solve such authentic problems, they must be understood clearly and applied correctly. As tools needed to solve felt difficulties,
classroom lessons and their application become important to all project stakeholders. If academics are not understood or their application to the problem is inappropriate, the problem will not be solved. In learning, applying, adjusting, relearning and reapplying academics, they become lessons that will not be soon forgotten. Academic aims are important guides for choosing and organizing projects--projects that are expected to increase academic understanding.

The example of mathematical order of operations is telling. This relatively simple mathematical rule should be introduced in the “classroom.” It can then be applied to the problem situation as part of a broader problem solution plan. By utilizing that skill in creative and reflective ways, students learn both its potential and its limitations as a tool. In determining what academic skills and knowledge are appropriate to the situation and how they should be appropriately used, those skills become vitally important to the student and, therefore, are vitally understood. This is a simple example of what was advocated by Kilpatrick, Hanna, and Dewey as explained in Chapter 4 of this study. Not only is academic skill and understanding created, but by reflecting upon the way it should be used, the overarching aim of critical reflection is advanced as well.

It must be noted here that the way student academic growth is evaluated will establish, to some degree, the status of the aim in question. That is, the evaluation process can partially determine whether or not an academic aim is philosophically sound. In states such as Florida, where final student evaluation is based on pencil and paper, statewide, standardized tests, the specific academic aims of service-learning become

25“Classroom,” here means in an introductory, informational manner rather than in immediate application.
problematic. Using a paper and pencil test is, in and of itself, not a problem as long as it is not the one and only indicator of meeting academic aims. That is, a standardized test that evaluates externally supplied aims might be a useful diagnostic tool.

However, the Florida program of high stakes testing compromises both the ends and means of service-learning education. Learning to take a test that requires the regurgitation of information presented in lecture form is antithetical to service-learning as an educational approach founded in student “felt problems” and experiential service to others. These “test-established” academic aims are exactly the type that John Dewey and other progressive educators warned against: they are rigid and offer teachers only “a mechanical choice of means.”

Aims that direct practice in service-learning must be responsive to the situation at hand, not established without knowledge of that situation. “Testing” in a service-learning situation demands that evaluative examinations take into account the specific educational situation and aims and would require broad and varied means of showing what was learned. High stakes standardized testing does neither and simply eliminates the numerous advantages of service-learning education.

Advocates of service-learning expect that academic growth will not just keep pace, but will out-pace more traditional approaches to teaching academics. Academic growth is very much entailed in its practice particularly when those aims are formulated in a philosophically sound manner. Not only should students come away from a service-

---

26 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 119.


28 Eyler, et.al, “At A Glance.”
learning project with a working knowledge of academic concepts, but the fact of their initiating interest as truly felt problems creates a much deeper understanding of that knowledge as well. Rigorous academic goals are important for directing a successful service-learning project and prove it to be anything but a “soft pedagogy.” In fact, when academic aims guide experiential learning, they will lead students to a depth of understanding that is not possible in traditional modes of teaching and learning.

Democratic Character Aims of Service-Learning Education

Character development, though important in traditional educational approaches, is not emphasized in the traditional context as explicitly as it is in the service-learning context. In the numerous definitions and descriptions of service-learning mentioned earlier in this study, democratic character development maintains a unique and essential role. The democratic application of academic lessons most completely distinguishes service-learning from traditional educational approaches. Democratic character development as an educational aim is entailed by service-learning in its notion of reflection among all service participants (student, teacher, community member) and in its notion of community service.

It is especially here, that those broad, social questions mentioned above come into play. That is, in order for an educational endeavor to develop democratic character, there must be an understanding of such concepts as democracy, character, responsibility,

---

29 For example, “The Wingspread Principles” mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study puts engaging “people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good” at the top of its list, and the Commission on National and Community Service also mentioned earlier lists “community needs,” “collaboration,” and “the development of a sense of caring for others” as necessary goals of service-learning.
citizenship, and so on. As will be argued in Chapter 7, these are issues that need further attention in relationship to service-learning education. Suffice it to say here that democratic character, as understood in service-learning practice, has at least these identifying traits: a willingness to interact with community “strangers;” a willingness to participate in democratic processes such as public debate and public elections; a view of individuals as equal partners in the democratic endeavor, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or other “cosmetic” differences; an inclination to act on reasonable, reflective decisions; the confidence that each individual (particularly oneself) has the ability and responsibility to participate in decision making; and, a general ethical disposition toward genuine, caring, and honest debate in making democratic decisions. These dispositions are what Robert Bellah calls democratic “habits of the heart” and are also democratic character aims of service-learning education.

The habit or disposition toward public debate and participation is, in fact, at the heart of service-learning education. Service-learning projects are the result of a “felt” problem in student experience. That feeling of a community problem is, in and of itself, a democratic activity. Problem realization is an indication of sensitivity to other individuals as well as the community at large. It is the understanding, as is argued in Chapter 3 of this study, that all individual community members are, in some way or

---


another, needy. Finally, service-learning teaches that these needs can be met by working together.

Again, reflection focuses student and teacher energy on solving the particular community problem through a reasonable mediation of experience and thoughtful hypothesizing of solutions. Reflection on community problems strengthens both the idea and the use of democratic decision and action. Through reflection, students come to understand the importance, in fact the necessity, of solving community problems communally. Seymour Lipsett recently argued, and Alexis de Tocqueville observed long ago, that it is through communal association and action that democratic decisions can be made in a society held together by common creed rather than by common ethnic history. This is an important lesson to be learned through service-learning projects. Finally, action and re-evaluation during project work further develops the disposition to democratic action, as solutions to problems are formulated, acted upon and judged for success. Acting to solve problems of interest on the part of students and teachers opens the possibility for further such action in other future community problem situations.

It is easy to see how proponents of service-learning can expect such a wide variety of outcomes as indicated by the research cited above. Service, when conceived and practiced as suggested in this study, provides nearly limitless opportunities to develop the democratic disposition in participating students. Service also provides nearly limitless opportunities to develop the very specific democratic character that America’s political situation demands. One example from the character outcomes research listed

---

above shows what this character development can mean to a community. Ethnic tolerance and understanding remain issues even centuries after the founding of the United States. Service-learning projects provide the opportunity for ethnic strangers to meet, work together, and solve common community problems. In doing so, the barriers among strangers fade. The crucial understanding that individuals from different ethnic groups have more in common than they have differences emerges quickly after the service-learning project work begins. Cooperative interaction rather than divisiveness is the key to solving perceived community problems. The specific problem of ethnic understanding is attacked and in so doing, the general democratic character traits noted above are developed in the specific project activities; and, once again, the general reflective habit of mind is continually developed and improved. Claims that service-learning projects can transform these kinds of community attitudes are supported by both research and philosophical analysis.

Though more traditional approaches to education in the United States advocate character education, it is not necessarily entailed in the educational process. For example, several states (Florida and Georgia are two examples) have adopted a program entitled “Character Counts” to “teach” democratic morality. For each month there is a different character “pillar” that is emphasized (truth, loyalty, care are examples). Generally, that emphasis comes in the form of lectures, posters, bumper stickers, and other advertising-like schemes. Teachers are expected to emphasize the particular pillar each month. Clearly, this is the kind of aim John Dewey warned against. Not only is the aim imposed from outside of the educational context, it is also “delivered” to students rather than learned in experience.
Service-learning, on the other hand, has democratic character as a built-in aim: it is entailed in its practice. Using academic skills and reflective thinking in active problem solving develops general democratic character as students interact one with another in their community. The shift in focus from simply talking and reading about democracy to actually doing democracy, makes the character development aim a philosophically reasonable one in service-learning.

Community Transformation Aims of Service-Learning Education

The final general category of service-learning aims is that of community transformation. It is clearly the most removed from traditional public school aims that tend to isolate schools from a community and its problems. Rather than be a source for problem solution, public schools are often seen as the source of those problems. Service-learning aims, however, demand that a school operate as an integral and active democratic community institution. Paul Hanna’s discussion nearly one hundred years ago provides the clearest and most complete understanding of how service-learning activities can and should foster democracy in a community. His argument was that when students and teachers leave the school and enter the community at large, they necessarily transform both community and school in important democratic ways. The trick, according to Hanna, is to ensure that the impact is positive and truly transformative. That is, the betterment of the entire community is the aim of community transformative action and must be clearly and continually kept in mind.

Specifically, Hanna suggested that a service project must meet three criteria to be acceptable and socially valuable. The first of these is that

Any project must culminate in the actual improvement of living in the community. Only when proposals are effective in changing the environment for the better can they be considered satisfactory from a pragmatic viewpoint. Fur-
ther, the world is so desperately in need of action for improvement that intelligent leadership of the young cannot permit the youthful energies to be dulled by endless discussion about action.\textsuperscript{33}

Hanna’s point, though made many years ago, remains important for contemporary service-learning theory and its implementation. If a service-learning project does not have as one of its goals the resolution of a felt community problem, then the project is doomed from the outset. This does not mean that every community problem attacked by a service-learning project will be solved on the first attempt. Reflective, human activity simply does not work this efficiently. However, it does mean that in successive attempts to devise and act on a problem in experience, the aim of solving that problem must be continually emphasized. If community service activity descends to merely social activity, service-learning is no longer a viable democratic practice. Without the guiding aim of solving a problem, project activity becomes inauthentic and runs the danger of teaching anti-democratic rather than democratic dispositions. Thought, without action, in Hanna’s argument, is not in any sense educational. That is, felt difficulties must be acted on with community improvement as the aim or else the work becomes the worst form of abstraction and undemocratic.

Secondly, Hanna suggested that though there clearly are some issues for which adults must take responsibility, and others that students might be disposed to deal with, it is best to work together in solving the community problem. In his words, “Projects must clearly be an obligation of youth as well as adulthood.”\textsuperscript{34} Youth must see that community problem solving is a responsibility for them as well as for adults. That goal

\textsuperscript{33} Paul Hanna, \textit{Youth Serves the Community} (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 36.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
can be accomplished best by organizing projects cooperatively on the part of both teacher and student. With this criterion of community impact, it is easy to see how democratic character development and community transformation go hand-in-hand. Cooperative democratic work of the kind called for in service-learning changes the community not only by solving problems, but in developing young people who will continue to work for community improvement, as well. This type of communal work perpetuates the idea that all community members are responsible for its well-being. It is a philosophical position that encourages a growing democratic confidence in young people--a confidence that will carry through to adult life. Social activity to solve current problems, not simply prepare for them in some future adult life, should be the goal of any service-learning project. When done well, this aim is necessarily entailed in service-learning practice.

Finally, and possibly most important, service-learning projects must bring about fundamental community change:

In so far as possible, projects must get at the basic problems of improving social welfare. Projects must not contribute to the further entrenchment of a social practice which is obviously evil. As an illustration: a project of providing Thanksgiving baskets for the poor, while lessening suffering for the moment, does not get at the root of the evil--the inadequate income of the majority of our families. Not only may the Thanksgiving-baskets-for-the-poor type of project contribute to the notion that we should hold a class of citizens in economic slavery in order that those of us who are more fortunate may annually have the smug satisfaction of "sharing" but, in addition, time and energy given to such superficial betterment could much more effectively be spent in getting at the basic inhibiting influences which perpetuate a scarcity-economy in the midst of abundance. Probably no other criterion in the social category is more often violated by project leaders who intend to do the best possible thing for youth and society, but fail to see that the project really contributes little even to the immediate amelioration of the evil and may even further crystallize it. If project leaders would guide the planning phases of projects more carefully and thoroughly and, through research and experimentation, drive the roots to deeper
soil, many projects which have been insignificant might be made significant in community improvement.\textsuperscript{35}

This very important aspect of community impact speaks directly to how service is conceived and practiced as described in Chapter 3 of this study. The point here is that the project work should create a fundamentally reconstructed community situation. A deep and lasting solution and connecting relationship must be the goal of service-learning activity for it to satisfy both community improvement and democratic aims. This deep and lasting community relationship will transform the individuals involved in the project; at the same time, the deep and lasting problem solution will transform the entire community. The democratic community impact aim has to be conceived as a permanent one in both the server-served relationships, as well as in the actual problem solution. If this aim is, again, not kept at the forefront of project activities, the project itself, as Hanna suggests, could very well make the problem worse and create further class division rather than stronger democratic connections required by service-learning community aims.

Implicit in these three criteria is the idea that essential school/community relationships must be established and strengthened. William Kilpatrick argued that these kinds of community projects ultimately “Serve to bring the youthful group (school or church or club, etc.) into desirable intimate contact with the surrounding community.”\textsuperscript{36} Clearly this must be a continual community impact aim in any service-learning project. In the last analysis, having students successfully participate in solving community problems builds a confidence among adults that young people are not just the cause of

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 37.

\textsuperscript{36} William Heard Kilpatrick, introduction to Youth Serves the Community by Paul Hanna (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936).
problems, but instead can provide the solutions. It also reassures students that adults have student welfare in mind when they act to solve community problems because those students work side by side with adults to solve the problems. It creates a Public school that is intimately connected to the broader community and strengthens democracy.

As is noted above, there is a need for more research that describes how service-learning can best be implemented in order to make a community better. That type of research is assuredly going on as this study is concluding. Philosophically speaking, the aim of transforming the community is entailed in the practice of service-learning. It is an aim that is created from within its practice--community problems are the initiators of service-learning practice; and, ultimately, reconstructing a community problem is its final goal. Through community transformation the goals of academic, reflective, citizenship education are accomplished.

**Consequences for Practice**

To summarize, educational aims must be entailed in practice and not placed onto practice from an external, authoritative position. Outcomes research indicates that service-learning goals can be discussed easily as falling into one of three categories: academic development, character development, and community impact. Adding the overarching goal and practice of reflective thinking, makes service-learning aims complete and understandable. That is, the goals of academic growth, character development, and community transformation are sound aims when service-learning practice is understood clearly. When aims of service-learning are established from within its practice, adjusted during practice, and continually guide that practice, the full power of the service-learning pedagogy is plain to see. Its expectations go well beyond those
found in traditional pedagogical approaches that emphasize lecture, memorization, and abstraction.

When these aims are understood as entailed in its practice, service-learning is an educational reform that is much more than the “soft pedagogy” decried in years gone by. Service-learning is an approach that, as was found in each of the previous three chapters, is much more difficult for a teacher to organize and implement. It means that a teacher must be sensitive to the developmental characteristics of her students so that aims, particularly academic and democratic aims, can be appropriately established. It means that a teacher must be flexible in adjusting aims as new situations and discoveries are made. Finally, and most removed from traditional practice, a teacher must be clear that the school is an important interactive community institution and her students are vital players in its community role. The teacher, therefore, must continually develop her own sense of the community and adjust that understanding as her students transform it. She has to be clear in “teaching” her students that they are part of the community, particularly its problems and their solutions. When practiced as suggested in this study, service-learning can reach each of these categorical goals as project work weaves together academic, democratic, and critical development in solving community problems and growing school-community relationships.
CHAPTER 7
SERVICE-LEARNING AS DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

The purpose of this study has been to clarify the concepts that direct service-learning education, thereby insuring that its practice is educationally successful and its widespread establishment is politically appealing. This conceptual clarification has been accomplished through the use of philosophical method. The author first traced the historical evolution of the service-learning idea and then applied philosophical analysis to the specific concepts embraced within its practice (service, experiential learning, and reflection). Clarifying these concepts made possible the exploration of both educational and community aims that reasonably can be expected from service-learning practice. Disentangling the conceptual framework is an essential step toward making service-learning a viable public education reform. This study also has been an endeavor that can be characterized as philosophically “internal.” That is, this analysis has considered the specific educational notions that are championed from within service-learning, rather than building a wider philosophy out of service-learning or using service-learning to advocate a broader social/political position.¹ As is argued in the opening chapter, a philosophically internal understanding is necessarily prior to discussions of foundationally wider social consequences that might result from service-learning’s practice.

There remain, however, several philosophical issues of “external” importance to service-learning that this study must attend to in order for it to be complete. The core project of this philosophically external discussion is that of characterizing service-learning’s place within a broader democratic theory of education. The United States has, in theory if not always in practice, developed around general democratic notions, and its system of public education is an essential institution for strengthening the philosophical understanding of the democratic social ideal.²

As a democratic educational practice, service-learning is a reform—not a radical departure from current practice or an educational revolution that would fundamentally change the way public education operates in this country. As an educational reform rather than a paradigmatic revolution, service-learning is simultaneously constrained by egalitarian concerns and obligated to develop deeper democratic understanding even as its advocates “re-form,” “re-shape,” or “re-work” specific educational practices; service-learning educators do not seek to alter or ignore the basic tenets of what public education means for democratic life.³ Service-learning cannot succeed as an educational reform in the United States unless the goal of advancing democratic understanding is met.

Certainly, the concluding chapter of a dissertation study can accomplish little in advancing democratic theory or even democratic educational theory. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, no less than four different variations of democratic theory have

---


³ Paradigm in this case is used as Thomas Kuhn did to represent a fundamental shift in how a practice is understood. See Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).
been called on to support the service-learning educational reform.\textsuperscript{4} The purpose of the present chapter is not to champion one of these positions or to develop a complete democratic theory of education that might fit service-learning. That important research must be taken up in more depth at a later time. However, a set of general democratic characteristics can be reasonably established from an admittedly simplified understanding of the relationship between public education and democracy. In this way, service-learning as an educational reform may be evaluated in light of general democratic educational expectations.

With this in mind, the writer first will suggest some general characteristics that are basic to any understanding of democratic education. These characteristics will be briefly examined and then used to place the theoretical understanding of service-learning presented in this study within a democratic public education context. In doing so, the discussion will answer the important question of whether, and if so how, this understanding meets the most basic demands of a democratic theory of education. The contextualizing of the theory presented in this study within democratic educational understanding will allow that theory to become a reasonable tool for criticism of current service-learning practice as well as serve as a foundation for future service-learning endeavors. Finally, this democratic explication of the service-learning concept will help direct future research efforts--efforts vital to a complete understanding of service-learning education.

The Need for a Democratic Theory of Education

It is important to remember that educational practice does not occur in a social vacuum. In fact, as has been maintained throughout this study, education is essentially a social endeavor that aims to achieve valuable social ends. John Dewey argued that education is so important to a society that social philosophy might be correctly understood as the general theory of education. Educational practice is where important social ideas are tested, and their worth evaluated. This is particularly true in the United States where public education is regularly criticized (though rarely praised) for its role as purveyor of democratic ideals and engine for the American economy. Democratic education’s overarching aim is the perpetuation of what Seymour Lipsett calls America’s exceptional “democratic creed.”

John Dewey argued in *Democracy and Education* that democracy as generally understood in the United States best enables citizens to interact across social classes--classes that were, until relatively recently, purposefully organized so as to remain only vaguely connected one to another. This social class separation came in the form of an aristocratic social construct--a construct that used physical force and birth obligation, rather than shared interests and interaction, as tools for social control. Democracy,

---

5 Many traditional approaches to teaching and learning ignore the social situation of democracy. See Chapter 4 of this study.


however, turns this hierarchical structure on its head by embracing give and take connection among individuals from every walk of life rather than disconnection perpetuated through class division and pre-established class responsibility. Dewey described democracy as a social ideal that is characterized by “varied points of shared common interest, [and] greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control” that changes social habit in its demand for “continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”

As the social ideal upon which America is founded, democracy must be the theoretical basis for educational practice as well. The understanding of public education in this country as the process through which the democratic social ideal is learned, reconstructed, and transmitted to future generations is essential to any educational practice. Clearly, an educational practice such as service-learning must be imbued with this exceptional democratic creed from start to finish if it is to be truly democratic. As Dewey said,

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.

Furthermore, as Amy Gutmann maintains in her important book Democratic Education, it is crucial that educational decisions be based on theoretical reflection rather

---

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 99.
than made by habitual knee-jerk reactions to public concerns in practice.\textsuperscript{12} Similarly, William James described philosophical theory as visionary, or “prospective.”\textsuperscript{13} That is, without a philosophical position from which to direct practice, the path to achieving a common good life through democratic education may consist of pendulum swings rather than reasonable, deliberative “prospective” decisions. Gutmann argues that in not developing and utilizing an educational \textit{theory} on which to base practice,

we neglect educational alternatives that may be better than those to which we have become accustomed or that may aid us in understanding how to improve our schools before we reach the point of crisis, when our reactions are likely to be less reflective because we have so little time to deliberate.\textsuperscript{14}

Service-learning is one such educational alternative that must be judged by democratic theory if it is to have a place as a reasonable democratic educational reform.

\textbf{The General Characteristics of a Democratic Theory of Education}

Arguing that democratic educational practice is essential to the life of a democracy is quite different than characterizing precisely what a democratic education should entail. The present discussion, as explained above, is concerned only with understanding the general characteristics that educational theory must embrace in order for it to be democratic in nature, and then analyze if and how these characteristics can be fostered from, and how they operate within, the specific practice of service-learning education. In this way, service-learning may be judged for its practical value as an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} William James, \textit{Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975), 53.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Gutmann, \textit{Democratic Education}, 5.
\end{itemize}
alternative form of democratic education. For an educational practice such as service-learning to fit within democratic theory, it should, at the very least, be reflective-deliberative, socially active, informed, nondiscriminatory, and nonrepressive.

**Democratic Education as Reflective-Deliberative, Informed, and Socially Active**

The first three of these essential characteristics of a general democratic theory of education are inextricably tied together and are the foundation for any educational theory operating in a democracy. Democratic education must, first, be reflective, as John Dewey maintained, and deliberative, as Amy Gutmann explained. That is, for an educational practice to be democratic in nature, it should champion reflective deliberation as a means of democratic participation and as a self-perpetuating end in itself. If an educational practice does not do so, then democratic citizens are left without the most essential skill needed to participate in democratic decisions.

Reflection is taken here to be explicitly Deweyan. As is explained in Chapter 5 of this study, the reflective process must be understood, modeled, practiced, and put to use correctly and continually if there is to be any expectation for students to learn it as a skill and as a general disposition. Educational practice must engender the most democratic of abilities, the ability to reflect and act upon problems in experience. Because democracy takes as its starting point the fact of diverse, thoughtful citizens as public policy makers, those policy-making citizens must feel, mediate, and act on problems as they occur in their personal experience. Democracy is both appealing in its freedom and equally frightening in its faith that individual citizens can and will participate in public policy decisions. In order to safeguard against the very real danger of democratic tyranny, the public justifiably expects its educational system to train citizens to direct their activities
“with foresight” and “plan according to ends-in-view or purposes” of which they are aware.¹⁵

In like fashion, because democracy is not anarchy, nor is it rule by experts, individual citizens must connect one with another to make decisions together. In Amy Gutmann’s words, individuals must “deliberate” (publicly reflect) together as interested stakeholders, to make decisions that might reasonably solve or prevent socially important and commonly felt problems. This democratic form of public policy making will naturally lead to disagreements that often are emotionally charged. Gutmann maintains correctly that these disagreements constitute an essential democratic virtue:

The most distinctive feature of a democratic theory of education is that it makes a democratic virtue out of our inevitable disagreement over educational [and other] problems. The democratic virtue, too simply stated, is that we can publicly debate educational problems in a way much more likely to increase our understanding of education and each other than if we were to leave the management of schools, as Kant suggests, ‘to depend entirely upon the judgment of the most enlightened experts.’ The policies that result from our democratic deliberations will not always be the right ones, but they will be more enlightened--by the values and concerns of the many communities that constitute a democracy--than those that would be made by unaccountable educational experts. We can do better to try instead to find the fairest ways for reconciling our disagreements, and for enriching our collective life by democratically debating them.¹⁶

To insure that disagreement remains a democratic virtue, citizens must learn that reflective-deliberation is part of the democratic process, which can be taught best by educational approaches that incorporate reflective-deliberation into their practice.

Of course, reflective-deliberation will operate at its best when the public is “informed” in the traditional educational manner. That is, the classically maintained


The educational aim of skills acquisition and knowledge construction cannot be ignored. One reason that academic aims are so crucial to service-learning is that action decisions must come from an academically informed position. If they are not, then they will not be wise decisions. Though, as Alfred North Whitehead famously proclaimed, “A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God’s earth,” a merely reflective, yet uninformed, democrat might be the most dangerous person on God’s earth.\(^\text{17}\) This study has maintained that the aim of building knowledge and acquiring skills can best be achieved by using ideas in practice. As Whitehead argued also, “In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call ‘inert ideas’--that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations.”\(^\text{18}\) A knowledgeable reflective-deliberator is a wise citizen who understands her position deeply, expresses it clearly and often and knows when action is necessary.

Finally, informed reflective-deliberation can be democratic in nature only when reasonable decisions are put to use in the democratic experience. Again, Whitehead’s point is clear (and is supported in the work of many theorists discussed earlier in this study). To be vital to a student, knowledge, skills, and reflection must come from lived experience and must then return to experience for testing. William Kilpatrick built his philosophy of education on purposeful activity; John Dewey championed mediation, hypothesizing, and testing; and Paul Hanna suggested active community transformation.

---


\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
through problem solution. Each of these scholars characterizes educational activity as socially active. John Dewey captures the nature of this relationship when he says that democratic “society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder.”

Democratic Education as Nonrepressive and Nondiscriminatory

Arguing from a position “inspired” by the work of John Dewey, Amy Gutmann provides two explicit and important additions to democratic educational theory—nonrepression and nondiscrimination. She argues that though the above-mentioned general characteristics clearly are essential to understanding democratic education, they are not enough to defend against what Alex de Tocqueville described as the “tyranny of the majority” or what Gutmann might call the tyranny of the family. These additional democratic characteristics, nonrepression and nondiscrimination, are important protectors of reflective, informed, and socially active deliberation. They prevent the possibility that democracy be transformed into a tyranny that stifles the voices of marginalized groups or individuals. As educational notions that protect “conscious social reproduction,” they

---

19 See Chapter 4.


21 Some have argued, and Gutmann implies agreement, that Dewey’s position lacked an understanding of power relationships. Nonrepression and nondiscrimination are clear attempts to incorporate a defense against hegemony. For a discussion of Dewey’s detractors and a defense of his position on this issue, see Randall Hewitt, “Renewing the Democratic Faith: A Philosophical Analysis of John Dewey’s Idea of Power (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2001).

22 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America (New York: The New American Library, 1956 [1835]).
provide future citizens with the same reflective rights and obligations as those enjoyed by current citizens.\textsuperscript{23}

In explaining what she means by nonrepression, Gutmann says that the principle of nonrepression prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. Nonrepression is not a principle of negative freedom. It secures freedom from interference only to the extent that it forbids using education to restrict rational deliberation or consideration of different ways of life. Nonrepression is therefore compatible with the use of education to inculcate those character traits, such as honesty, religious toleration, and mutual respect for persons, that serve as foundations for rational deliberation of differing ways of life. Nor is nonrepression a principle of positive liberty, as commonly understood. Although it secures more than a freedom from interference, the “freedom to” that it secures is not a freedom to pursue the singularly correct way of personal or political life, but the freedom to deliberate rationally among differing ways of life.

Because conscious social reproduction is the primary ideal of democratic education, communities must be prevented from using education to stifle rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society.\textsuperscript{24}

As will be argued below, nonrepression is an essential characteristic of service-learning theory as understood in this study; it must, however, be made explicit so that practitioners will keep it ever mindful.

The second important addition Gutmann makes to democratic theory, and by implication to service-learning theory is the idea that democratic education must be nondiscriminatory. For public education to be democratic in the sense that all citizens ought to participate in the democratic process, it must be available to every individual. Clearly nondiscrimination is a “distributional complement” to nonrepression. That is,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Gutmann uses the phrase “conscious social reproduction” throughout her book. It connotes reflective, informed and socially active deliberation as explicitly explained here. Gutmann, Democratic Education, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 44-45 (Gutmann’s emphasis).
\end{itemize}
nondiscrimination is a universal democratic right. As Gutmann convincingly argues, repression historically has come in the form of hidden or unrealized classroom practices that ignore or stifle the voices of such groups as females or racial minorities. Nondiscrimination attempts to eliminate that hidden marginalizing of minority groups by demanding that every has access to democratic education. This policy is meant to insure that the skills necessary to reflective, informed, socially active deliberation are available for all educable students. Gutmann explains that

nondiscrimination extends the logic of nonrepression, since states and families can be selectively repressive by excluding entire groups of children from schooling or by denying them an education conducive to deliberation among conceptions of the good life and the good society. In its most general application to education, nondiscrimination prevents the state, and all groups within it, from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the legitimate social purpose of that good. Applied to those forms of education necessary to prepare children for future citizenship (participation in conscious social reproduction), the nondiscrimination principle becomes a principle of nonexclusion. No educable child may be excluded from an education adequate to participating in the political processes that structure choice among good lives.  

These two principles, when added to informed, active, and reflective deliberation, create a helpful understanding of democratic educational principles. They also, when added to the conceptual understanding of service-learning education, make a firm foundation upon which to develop future service-learning activities as well criticize current service-learning efforts.

Service-Learning As a Democratic Educational Reform

The democratic characteristics discussed above, it must be re-emphasized, represent the bare minimum that any form of democratic education must meet. The question for service-learning is, quite simply, can it meet these minimal requirements and

25 Ibid., 45.
how might it do so. Generally, service-learning is a viable form of democratic education; however, like all educational approaches, it is one whose success is left to those individuals who organize and implement it. As this study argues, those individuals must have a complete understanding of service-learning’s conceptual foundation if it is to succeed as a democratic educational reform.

Service-Learning as Reflective-deliberative, Informed, and Socially Active

As is maintained in Chapter 5 of this study, reflective activity is at the heart of service-learning practice. In advocating reflection in service-learning as Dewey conceived it, this study suggests that reflection must be a continual activity throughout a service-learning project, not simply post project reflection as found in many current and past service-learning situations: project choice comes out of student-felt problems, informed student plans are formulated, and those plans then are put to the test in the problem experience to evaluate their worth. Clearly, this type of reflection is required of any form of democratic education. Because democracy is based on individual participation in making public policy, citizens must have available the skills needed to mediate and reasonably consider problems of personal and public importance. Amy Gutmann’s idea of deliberation—reflection made public—completes the notion of democratic participation as public policy decisions. That is, individuals reflect and deliberate together to make democratic decisions—persuading, listening, deciding, and testing.

The service aspect of service-learning is part and parcel of reflective deliberation. In the service activity, student-made plans are put to the test in attempts to solve the project problem. More importantly, however, the service activity provides an important deliberative opportunity for the students carrying out the projects: they have the
opportunity to speak to, deliberate with, learn from, and connect with a population of “strangers.” As is implied in Chapter 3 of this study, the real democratic work is done when groups of strangers come together, work together, solve problems together, and connect as people who have similarities as well as differences. This intense form of deliberative interaction meets the democratic demand for reflective-deliberative “conscious social reproduction” and creates a situation that is genuinely active and, therefore, educational. As project stakeholders make and act on contentious public decisions related to the service project, the democratic process is learned and gradually becomes an habitual form of social activity for all participants.

As a purely educational activity, service-learning practitioners should use the project situation to construct knowledge and teach necessary skills. The decisions made and plans implemented through active reflection become the source for an increasingly complex understanding of knowledge and skills. This increased academic understanding does not mean that every plan is going to be successful in solving the project problem; to the contrary, the testing, adjusting, and retesting new solutions in experience makes the learning in service-learning so valuable in contrast to more traditional approaches and therefore more powerfully democratic. Informed, genuine, decision making in service projects means that students develop skills and use ideas in ways that traditional, classroom-only education simply cannot match.

Finally, service-learning as a democratic endeavor is transformative for an entire community. As Paul Hanna argued and as is explained in the previous chapter of this study, if the project problem is genuine and truly reflective-deliberative decisions are
made and put into action, the community problem will be solved. Ultimately, this community transformation activity is the epitome of education as a democratic endeavor. When the goal of community transformation/improvement is met through informed, reflective, and active citizen participation, education for democracy will have been achieved.

**Service-learning as Nonrepressive and Nondiscriminatory**

The two additional democratic components of nonrepression and nondiscrimination are more problematic for service-learning. The reason they are more problematic is that, though they might be entailed in many of the various definitions of service-learning, they are not explicitly stated or explained as are the reflective-deliberative characteristics of service-learning. As assumptions, rather than stated democratic guiding principles, nonrepression and nondiscrimination remain unexplained and unexplored in service-learning practice. That is, it is simply expected by service-learning practitioners and theorists that both nonrepression and nondiscrimination will be a part of service-learning practice. However, as Gutmann makes clear, these democratic concepts must be made explicit if they are to be more than just vague, misunderstood guidelines for practice.

An example will clarify this concern. As has been noted several times in this study, there exist a seemingly endless number of definitions and guidelines for service-learning practice. One of the more important events in service-learning history was the creation of the Wingspread Special Report that contained “Ten Principles of Effective Service-learning Practice.” The last “principle” in that report is that an effective service-

---

26 Paul Hanna, *Youth Serves the Community*.  

learning program is “committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.” This particular characteristic of service-learning practice is explained later in the report as an opportunity to “participate” with diverse people. However, it simply does not go far enough in explaining exactly what is meant by “participation.” As Richard Kraft points out,

As the [Wingspread] report expands upon these principles, it continues to frame the involvement of service partners as service providers and recipients. As previously stated, this focus does not go far enough in acknowledging the strengths of the served, and does not adequately address the barriers keeping these individuals from fully participating in society. The concept of “partners in service” needs to be embraced in the principles themselves for programs to emulate a paragon of equality.

This common misguided notion of participant interaction can be corrected by the explicit inclusion of the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination as conceived by Amy Gutmann. These two democratic characteristics demand that conversations among the “strangers” in a service project occur regularly and carry important meaning both in social connections and project problem solution. Without the explicit inclusion of nonrepression and nondiscrimination, service-learning runs the risk of not satisfying the requirements demanded by a democratic form of public education. That demand is that all stakeholders have a voice in reflecting and acting to solve the project problem. To ensure that all voices are heard, nondiscrimination and nonrepression must be continually active policies that direct and protect reflective dialogue. When service-learning is understood as socially active, reflective, deliberative, and guided by the twin policies of

---


nonrepression and nondiscrimination, it is a hopeful form of educational practice for the perpetuation of democracy through the creation of democratically minded, informed, and socially active citizens.

**A Critique of Service-Learning Practice**

Numerous annual publications summarize service-learning projects around the country. These reports provide ample opportunity to use the conceptual outline provided in this study to critique constructively service-learning practice. It is, after all, the hope that this study will be a guide for developing future service-learning practice.

As a guide for future practice, this understanding can function first as a critique of current or past service-learning projects. This kind of critique can be helpful, however, only if there is intimate service project knowledge. That is, a critique cannot be based only on a project summary found in a collection that summarizes promising practices; the specific how’s, where’s and what’s must be known intimately before project improvements based on new conceptual understandings can go forward. Therefore, this study will return to where it began to see what insights it can provide for one particular instance of service-learning education.

The impetus, or as Dewey would say the “felt problem,” for this study came in the form of a service-learning project that was funded by Learn and Serve Florida in 1995-96. The project was part of a larger program in the state of Florida that was called PARKnership. The PARKnership program paired public schools with nearby state parks,

---

29 See as examples, James Watkins, *Sharing Success in the Southeast: Promising Service-Learning Programs* (Greensboro, NC: Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, 1993); “Sharing Success,” Florida Learn and Serve, [www.servicelearning.org/resources_tools/program_directory](http://www.servicelearning.org/resources_tools/program_directory); Florida Learn and Serve,
creating the opportunity for students to have access to a valuable resource and, in return, to provide a valuable service. This particular PARKnership situation involved Ravine State Gardens in Palatka, Florida with nearby Interlachen High School (IHS). The Learn and Serve Florida grant program looked to be a great way to fund the growing PARKnership relationship between “Ravines” (as it is referred to by the locals) and IHS.

Conceptual Misunderstandings and their Practical Consequences

The grant-writing process and, by implication, the service-learning process began on a frosty, late winter morning as one teacher and two park rangers met around a concrete bench at the park to decide what community needs should be taken up in this service-learning project. Following a few hours of discussion, touring the park, and more discussion, the “committee” decided that one problem the park had was that elderly and disabled visitors had little or no access to the ravine that was the centerpiece of the park. It was difficult to make it available to people with disabilities or people who, because of their age or physical limitations, could not maneuver through the difficult terrain.

To alleviate this access problem and, at the same time, provide an educational opportunity for the students of IHS, two projects were formulated. The first was to construct a series of handrails along the entire system of trails that led down into and back out of the ravine. This would provide the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the ravine safely. Secondly, a video documentary tour would be produced so that people whose physical disabilities prevented them from using the new, safer trails, still would be able to enjoy the offerings of the park. These two projects also would provide students from IHS the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to a

genuine problem. After much work on the part of the teacher and park rangers, the grant was submitted, and within several months the monies to implement it were secured.

The students and teachers of Interlachen High School worked very hard. In conjunction with the park rangers, a plan was made and the handrails went up. A student script was written for the video, complete with a history of the park. A film crew was put together, the park was captured on tape, and the tape was edited and developed into a quality video. The narration provided by the script made the video complete. Students and teachers alike enjoyed applying classroom knowledge and skills to solve a community problem; and yet, something was not quite right. A truly transformative educational opportunity was missed because service-learning was misunderstood at a foundational, conceptual level.

Because the teacher and park rangers did not understand reflection as it is explained in this study, the project was a missed opportunity from the outset. Reflection, as explained in Chapter 5, must originate as a felt problem in the experiences of those who face the problem and those who apply its solution. It also must be a continual part of the project, not simply a looking back once the project is completed. The “reflection” on the part of students and teachers had neither of these characteristics. The park rangers and teacher simply presented a problem and its solution to the students with little or no discussion as to why it was a problem and why it was important to solve that problem. The students neither “felt” the problem nor were they asked how the problem might be solved. The project leaders never modeled the reflective process and so when reflective opportunities did happen, they were haphazard and shallow matters rather than the important learning process described by Dewey. In fact, the only formal reflective
activity that the students were asked to do was to react after the project by making two lists, one indicating what they learned or got out of the project and another suggesting ways to improve the project.

The reflective activity of listing what they learned or got from the project is telling. There is very little in the way of reflection as it is embraced in this study. The most consistent answer to this question was, “we got out of school for the day!” The majority of the answers were in fact affective reactions celebrating time spent with others outside doing manual labor. Some of the common answers included, “work together as a group,” “going to Burger King for lunch,” “getting to know the park rangers,” “getting to know your teachers,” and “having fun with friends.” These in and of themselves are not bad reactions. However, they do not indicate that the students understood in any important way either the problem or its solution. The specific problem and project focus should have been the restrictions faced by the elderly and disabled at the park. Very few of the student reactions indicated that understanding.

As for the “service” provided to the elderly and disabled, it fell short as well of what is called for by this understanding of service-learning. The elderly and disabled of the community never were consulted for suggestions or even asked if their limited access to the park was truly a problem for them. Reflective interaction is, at least partially, the understanding that service is a mutual process that should go on between “strangers,” and that simply did not occur. This project provided an opportunity for high school students to meet, learn about, learn from, and connect with the elderly and disabled members of their community, but because the project organizers lacked the conceptual understanding that reflection and service must come from continual dialogue between disparate groups
working to solve a common problem, the project devolved into precisely the kind of situation that Chapter 3 of this study warns against: arrogant, hegemonic service to those who never asked for it. Instead of establishing a meaningful connection among teens, the elderly, and the disabled, the teens provided a service to some imagined group of needy old folks. This type of “service” simply reinforces assumptions about unfamiliar groups of people and does nothing to connect members of a community in a common cause. The evidence of this was clear: of the 75 reactive lists of what was learned from the project, only one student even mentioned the elderly and none mentioned the disabled. This student wrote, “It was fun talking to the old people in the park.”

The concept of service on which this project was based also violated the democratic demands of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. The first instance of repression occurred when students were handpicked by the teachers and park rangers involved. Only certain students were allowed to participate based on GPA (they had to meet extra-curricular eligibility requirements) and discipline referrals (if they had any recent referrals, they could not participate). The most needy (in educational matters) were not involved because of school policy and teacher choice. Secondly, student voice was repressed as the teacher and park rangers decided for the students how the project would proceed. There were numerous occasions when students had project suggestions and those suggestions were summarily dismissed rather than discussed and evaluated (reflected on). Instead of dismissing student suggestions, they should have been used to model and practice reflective deliberation. An opportunity to participate in a democratically determined decision was missed.
Traditionally, teen voice in problem solution is stifled because of the impression that high school students simply are not ready to make decisions and formulate plans of action, and this project was no exception to that traditional understanding. The Ravines project was clearly an example of adults undermining “the future deliberative freedom of children.”30 In this case, student voice was repressed in such a way that they either were not allowed to participate, or once they were allowed, their voices were stifled in the decision making process. Again, in the written reactions there was no indication that the students felt as if they had solved any problem at all. In fact, they had solved no problem but had simply provided a cosmetic cover for one. This is exactly the kind of result that Paul Hanna warned of in his discussion of community transformation. The students simply did what they were told and in doing so were able to “get out of school for the day.” Service-learning, as it is understood here, seeks to give voice to the marginalized and teach the reflective-deliberative process as a democratic problem solving activity. Clearly this project accomplished neither of these important aims.

As to nondiscrimination, the handpicking of students was clearly a case of discriminatory practice because, as might be expected, those students who did not make the eligibility requirements were the same ones who are traditionally marginalized. This is particularly problematic because these are the same students who would gain the most from an alternative educational approach such as service-learning. A second form of discrimination came with the service itself. In not consulting the elderly and disabled (including the disabled student population who were not even invited to participate in the project) about the park and their problems related to it, their voices were stifled. One

30 Gutmann, Democratic Education, 45.
might argue that in not consulting these citizens, they were indeed discriminated against, and the perception that they should have no voice because of their age and infirmaries was perpetuated among the students.

Though the most successful aspect of this entire project ended up being the experiential nature of classroom academics, it too fell short of its potential impact. Students were allowed to make use of classroom lessons in a genuine “real world” situation. They were allowed to manipulate experiences and adjust to problems in the application of both skills and knowledge. Clearly the video project provided an opportunity that no classroom-only situation could provide for learning the process of writing and producing a quality film. Several students, in fact, listed that as an important academic skill they learned during the project. In the same way, building the handrails provided a chance to apply skills learned in class to a genuine life situation. However, as in the case of service and reflection, experiential education is not simply a matter of academic skill improvement isolated from reflection and service. Experiential education means creating a solution for a genuine problem and then implementing it with input from all stakeholders. It means adjusting the plan as unforeseen contingencies arise. It includes the very important development of understanding the “strangers” and learning how to interact with them.

This project, rather, was planned by the teacher/park ranger committee and therefore did not come from student experience. The students might very well have developed a different plan for solving the project problem, or even may have picked an entirely different project. They certainly would have learned more about all the aspects of the project had they interacted with those whose problem they were attempting to
solve. In the end, the PARKnership service-learning project at Ravine State Gardens was an affectively, emotionally, satisfying experience as indicated by the students’ written reactions. But, it fell well short of being an ideal service-learning project and, in fact, engendered dispositions and practices that are antithetical to service-learning as this study argues it should be understood and practiced.

Finally, the project only partially met the demand explained by Paul Hanna that projects of this sort be transformative. Though the community was improved through these two projects, the chance to truly transform it in the substantive way explained in the previous chapter was missed on at least two counts. First, as a social transformation that might have developed a connection among disparate community groups, this project failed. Lacking the interactive dialogue and the resulting solidarity among teens, the elderly, and the disabled, the project, instead of providing important community connections, perpetuated the views that the elderly and disabled are in need and that teens have little that they can provide to a community other than menial labor. Secondly, the impact on the park was less than it could have been with the input of all stakeholders. That is, had the elderly and disabled been involved in the process, different and better approaches to the project problem might well have been discovered and democratic connections would have been established. Maybe the video and handrail construction eased the problem. However, that was not determined because those individuals being served were never part of the process and were never asked how these two endeavors improved their community lives.

Reconstructing Future Service-learning Practice

Certainly, if the organizers of the above project had available a conceptual foundation as is developed in this study, the project might have looked much different.
Students, working with other community members, would have developed and implemented a plan based on dialogue with park visitors, rangers, and community leaders. The plan would have been the result of experienced, felt problems on the part of the entire community. Students would have been asked to continually reflect on the project in both formal and informal ways. A regular and continual dialogue among all stakeholders would have been maintained as a way to evaluate plan implementation and suggest adjustments. This reflective service activity would have deepened understanding and improved academic skills beyond what traditional modes of teaching and learning can accomplish. The community would have been substantially rather than cosmetically transformed, as both attitudes and the park itself would have been remade.

Future service-learning projects of this sort can be made into effective forms of democratic education only when the concepts that drive practice are clearly understood. The hope of this study is that those concepts now can be seen as a basis for practical project design and decision making. When these conceptual understandings are used as practical guides, service-learning can meet the demands of a democratic reform of current educational practice. Without this conceptual understanding, service-learning devolves into a form of education that perpetuates rather than reforms democracy and educational practice in this country.

**Suggestions for Service-Learning Research**

This study leaves numerous questions unanswered--questions that must be considered in future research if service-learning is to be the transformative practice that it could and should be. Though the conceptual understanding of service-learning embraced in this study implies much about what democracy and community mean to educational
practice, there remains the project of explicitly explaining how community and
democracy should be understood as overarching social and, therefore, philosophical
constructs that support and are supported by service-learning education. Those
overarching philosophical questions include, but are certainly not limited to, “What
exactly is a community and how are community connections established and maintained
among disparate groups?” “How does capitalism influence the service-learning
concept?” “How do current governmental policies affect community transformation?”
What types of community problems can and cannot be remedied by service-learning?”
These are just a few of the questions that are entailed by the present understanding of
service-learning education.

It is equally important that the conceptual framework laid out in this discussion
have verification in practice. That is, as John Dewey argued, the hypotheses of this study
must be tested in practice through other types of research that are based on the present
understanding of service-learning education. Without a return to experience for
verification in practice, philosophy remains an abstract endeavor, and this study is no
exception.31 Some research questions that this discussion leads to include: “Do teachers
and students understand reflection as it is described in this study?” “How can this
conception of reflection best be taught?” “What affect does service in service-learning
have on understanding charity, philanthropy, volunteerism?” “What specific changes
must take place in public education to implement service-learning?” “How much time

31 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston, MA: The Beacon Press,
1958 [1920]), v-xli.
must be spent teaching each component of the service-learning concept?” The value of this study will be determined by answering these and other similar questions.

Concluding Remarks

This study has come full circle. It was initiated by the gnawing feeling that something was amiss in a genuine service-learning experience. In investigating that disequilibrium, the author discovered that no clear and complete conceptual discussion was available to drive practice. Without an understanding of what service-learning concepts mean, service-learning practice has no guide. This study is an attempt to mediate that problem through analyzing and developing a reasonable conceptual framework. As a reflective research endeavor, there remains one more step: the application of the notions developed in this study to a service-learning project and to future service-learning research. This writer hopes that this essential philosophical discussion will make service-learning a meaningful and viable reform of democratic education.
LIST OF REFERENCES


__________. 1938. Experience and Education. New York: Macmillan Co.


Hesser, Garry. 1998. Outcomes Attributed to Service-Learning and Evidence of Changes in Faculty Attitudes About Experiential Education. *Advances in Education Research* 3 (Fall): 50-58.


173

__________. 1936. Introduction to Youth Serves the Community by Paul Hanna. New

Kolb, David. 1984. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and

Kraft, Richard. 1998. Service Learning: An Introduction to its Theory, Practice, and
Effects. Advances In Education Research 3 (Fall): 7-23.

Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago, IL: The
University of Chicago Press.

Langer, Susanne. 1956. On the Relations Between Philosophy and Education.
Harvard Educational Review 26 (Spring): 139-141.

Lewis, James. 1977. What is Learned in Expository Learning and Learning by Doing?
Ph.D diss., University of Minnesota.

Company.


Liu, Goodwin. 1999. Introduction to Service-Learning: A Movement’s Pioneers Reflect
on Its Origins, Practice, and Future, edited by Timothy Stanton, Dwight Giles,
and Nadinne Cruz. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Mann, Horace. 1849. Twelfth Annual Report Covering the Year 1848. Boston, Ma:
Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers.

Markus, Gregory B., Jeffrey Howard, D.C. King. 1993. Integrating Community Service
and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results from an Experiment.

Campus Compact. Denver, CO: Colorado Campus Compact.

Meade, George Herbert. 1934. Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social
Behaviorist. Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago press.

Conservation Corps, 1933-1942. Montpelier, Vt.: P.H. Merrill.

Mezirow, Jack and Associates. 1990. Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood San
Francisco: Jossey Bass.


Zelman, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Ohio V. Simmons-Harris. No. 00-1751. Supreme Court of the United States of America.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born “the son of a preacher man,” as the old song goes and though it is a simple statement, it explains most of my early life. As a “P.K.,” I did everything in my power to live up to our Hell-raiser stereotype. Hell-raising was a tough job made tougher by the fact that Dad did his preaching within the confines of The United Church of Christ--a very open-minded, “liberal,” and politically active Christian organization. Our home, instead of being based on a “spare the rod, spoil the child” philosophy, was generally quiet, reflective, and peaceful. It was difficult to create much of a ruckus. I also sat through 13 years or so of listening (well, usually listening) to Dad speak from the pulpit every single Sunday morning. His sermons consisted of pragmatic advice, dotted with left wing, or at least liberal, political rhetoric often about the “goings on” in Southeast Asia.

When I left home and family for college at the age of 18, I also left religion. I could not, however, shake the love of philosophy or the desire to serve others that had been encouraged by my parents. I went through a series of undergraduate majors that reflected my belief that there should be more to life than simply accumulating wealth: business, math education, pre-law, political science, and finally philosophy. There are really only two roads a philosophy major can take. Because I had already discounted law as an option, I entered graduate school. After floundering for a year and a half in a philosophy department that was committing academic suicide, I found myself out of school, newly married, and pumping gas for a living.
Luckily, the young lady who had agreed to marry me remained undaunted. It was not long before she had me back in school studying to be a high school English teacher. She figured this might provide me the opportunity to study, think, help others, and make a decent living. She was right. After completing an M.Ed. at the University of Florida, I landed a job teaching English in one of the poorest counties in the state, and I absolutely loved it. The plan was to teach for 5 years, save money, quit working and go back for that elusive Ph.D. I am now in the midst of my fourteenth year of teaching at the same high school!

Though life and work intervened, I still managed to go back to school and slowly but surely completed my doctoral studies. The years of teaching high school have taught me that there is much more to helping others, teaching, or earning a Ph.D. than simply saying that it will happen. The years of study at the University of Florida under the mentoring of people such as Robert Wright and Robert Sherman have shown me that compassion for others can only happen through a philosophically sound guide to action. Much of this study is an attempt to explain education’s role in such an endeavor. I will take the message of pragmatic, compassionate service with me as I leave the pew and enter the pulpit of higher education.