



University of Nebraska Omaha
DigitalCommons@UNO

Higher Education

Service Learning

1-1993

Models of Service and Civic Education: An Occasional Paper of the Project on Integrating Service and Academic Study

Keith Morton

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered>

 Part of the [Service Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Morton, Keith, "Models of Service and Civic Education: An Occasional Paper of the Project on Integrating Service and Academic Study" (1993). *Higher Education*. Paper 131.

<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcehighered/131>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Service Learning at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Higher Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



CAMPUS COMPACT

THE PROJECT FOR PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Models of Service and Civic Education

An Occasional Paper of the
Project on Integrating Service and Academic
Study

Keith Morton

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

510
A
MOR
1993



Models of Service and Civic Education

Executive Summary

Citizenship education is generally recognized as the primary reason for supporting service-learning on college campuses. Assumptions about citizenship affect how programs and curricula are structured. An analysis of programs around the country identified four sets of "core assumptions" about civic education that inform service-learning courses and programs. This paper is intended to be useful to faculty designing service-learning courses and to those who want to make explicit multiple frameworks for understanding service experiences.

- **Liberal democracy** emphasizes relationships between persons and state. Its subject of inquiry is "freedom," understood as the tension between individual rights and state authority. Attention is given to describing the relationship between mainstream political practices (voting, office-holding, lobbying etc.) and the experience one has in a service-based course.

- **Participatory democracy**, which typically begins with practical attempts to understand power. The general orientation is "bottoms up," with more sophisticated programs emphasizing "public arts" such as power-mapping, diversity, self-interest, judgment and negotiation. Service is designed to magnify the "capacity" and "voice," rather than repair the "deficiencies," of those served.

- **Social justice** models view individual involvement in service as an opportunity to witness firsthand forms of injustice. Politics begins with the assumption that human beings have certain rights. The limits of these rights are examined, and questions of distributive justice and political economy are explored. Politics is a means (or an obstacle) to creating a more just society.

- **Service as citizenship** assumes that service is itself the defining act of citizenship, and that the relationship between the individual and the community (rather than the state) is of primary concern. One tradition derives from the role and history of voluntary associations in the politics of the United States; the other from Robert Greenleaf's observation that true leadership begins with service to a community. In both streams, the emphasis is on caring, interdependence and the "authenticity" which results from integrated values and action.

The models are not antithetical, and in practice some mixture of the four is usually found. Typically, however, one model becomes the lens through which citizenship and service is understood. All four models share three elements that are ideally developed in a course or program: teaching how to articulate one's self in a public context; developing the capacity to think strategically; and lowering the perceived and real barriers to participation in public life.

Models of Service and Civic Education
Campus Compact
Keith Morton

Introduction

Educating students for citizenship is an accepted and increasingly prominent rationale for institutional support of service-learning, especially where service is tied formally to a core academic curriculum. More specifically, it means preparing students for participation in a democracy. Community service-based courses and programs are viewed as a powerful vehicles for driving home the lessons of citizenship.

Our assumptions about the relationship among service, citizenship and higher education were captured in a 1985 Carnegie Foundation report by Frank Newman. The Newman Report on Higher Education Policy concluded that, "The most critical demand is to restore higher education [to] its original purpose of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship." The means for bringing about this transformation, the report continued, is service: "For all the cynicism about political life in this country . . . there remains deep in the American psyche a belief in the ideal of service to country as a proper step to adulthood."

A review of the Newman Report seven years after its publication suggests that we have been successful in moving ahead with a service agenda: gaining national and Presidential recognition of service, increasing service opportunities for students, linking service to education reform in local, state and federal policy making, increasing federal and state funding, and creating a genuine debate about a national service option.

With many of the initial community "survival" battles fought and won (however provisionally) by proponents of service-learning, the time has come to ask what we mean by civic education. Increasingly, we are finding that our shared language of citizenship contains multiple and sometimes contradictory assumptions and objectives.

The differences that exist are more than semantic. Steve Schultz, director of the Urban Program at Westmont College, put it well at the 1992 meeting of the National Society for Experiential Education when he observed that, "Our program models contain our definitions of citizenship."

Our assumptions about citizenship profoundly affect how programs and curricula are structured. Campus Compact has only recently begun summarizing the civic education lessons taught by those engaged in service-learning, with notable leadership provided by The Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers University and Project Public Life at the University of Minnesota.

Four Understandings of Service and Citizenship

My analysis of programs around the country identified four sets of "core assumptions" informing practice. The descriptions are not exhaustive, and derive from what is being practiced, rather than from theories of democratic politics. The models are my attempt to describe what people are actually doing in community-service based programs and service-learning courses around the country.

Liberal Democracy

The essential assumption in programs with this emphasis is that citizenship is defined by the relationships between persons and the state. The defining value of liberal democracy is "freedom," and the most pressing questions are those regarding the tension between rights and obligations. The context for these discussions is captured by Alan Wolfe in Whose Keeper: Social Science and Moral Obligation: "To be modern is to face the consequence of decisions made by complete strangers while making decisions that will affect the lives of people one will never know."

In practice, this perspective assumes that the political and economic systems of the United States are theoretically sound and only require more active and informed participation to work well. The watchword is "Involvement." The objective of programs so oriented is describing the relationship between mainstream political practices (voting; standing for office; creating, supporting and implementing legislation and other forms of policy) and the experience one has as a participant in a community-service based course.

Service experiences are designed to illustrate and intersect with the lessons of "core documents" such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and landmark Supreme Court cases such as *Brown vs Board of Education*. An example would be college students tutoring in an inner-city, low-income high school while studying the history of education and education policy. A reading list might include Why

Johny Can't Read, Horace's Compromise, Free to Teach and A Place Called School. Meetings with school officials, related organizations, and key public leaders (mayor, state senator) could round out the experience.

Participants are seen as future "leaders," that is, persons who must develop the technical expertise and humanistic impulses that will allow them to manage the complex issues and systems of the modern world - a world in which they will make decisions affecting the lives of people they will never meet.

Participatory Democracy

The words "participatory democracy," and "citizen democracy" are rooted in the Populist Movement of the late nineteenth century and the "alternative" politics of the 1960s. More recently this emphasis is being recast in the practical language of "citizen problem solving."

The primary focus in this approach is understanding power as it is practiced in the concrete lives of real people. The state receives no special consideration, but is simply one of several important arenas for public decision making. Participating in power is necessary for people and communities to manage their lives. The general orientation is that "bottoms up" is the appropriate channel for decision making.

Less sophisticated programs tend to emphasize a limited understanding of "leadership," loosely defined as a set of technical skills: editing a flyer, organizing a committee, speaking in public or chairing a meeting. These skills are seen as necessary to sharing in power.

More sophisticated approaches emphasize "public arts" such as power-mapping, self-interest, diversity, judgment and negotiation. From this vantage point, a poor program is one which concentrates on "giving the disenfranchised a voice", or speaking for "them;" a strong program is one which builds on the inherent capacity of people, whatever their situation, to speak for themselves.

College students, for example, might help junior high youth define, analyze and act on a problem or issue that matters to them, teaching (and learning themselves) "public arts" in the process. If the youth recognize racism as an issue they want to work on, for example, they are asked to describe how it affects their immediate lives. From

these descriptions a working definition of racism would emerge, and embedded in it would be a number of potential solutions.

A high school student, for example, might say "The security guards at the mall hassle black kids for no reason except that they are black." A college student volunteer would work with the youth to define and perhaps prove this, tease out possible solutions and evaluate the solutions in terms of their logistical and political complexities and the likelihood for success. A watershed would come when the group leaders asked, "Who do you need to work with to make the changes we want?" and the youth began developing the relationships that would allow them to move forward. This sort of process is described in Building Ownership: A Coach's Guide to Teaching Politics, published by Project Public Life at the University of Minnesota.

The long-term emphasis in citizen participation is on empowerment or capacity building. Quite often there is an underlying value or theology that explicitly recognizes the inherent worth of each individual person. The term "capacity" is often used as the opposite of "deficiency," and a common critique is that other models of service (from shelters to the Welfare State) define people in terms that make some characteristic of their core identity (race, class, gender, physical ability, education) a deficiency and turn this person into a "client" to be cared for by a professional. Too often, this critique points out, people with power step in and attempt to "respond to" a perceived deficiency, rather than seeking to enhance capacity.

For the college students, typical readings would include Ben Barber's Strong Democracy, Harry Boyte's Commonwealth, a selection from Saul Alinsky, such as Rules for Radicals, the introduction to Lawrence Goodwyn's The Populist Moment and a relevant case study.

Social Justice

The essential element of this model is the firsthand experience of injustice. Typically, an individual relationship becomes a "lens" for seeing an issue in terms of its human consequences, and the learning that takes place is often framed in terms of "distributive justice." Some models are explicitly rooted in religious or theological traditions, while others are wholly secular in their approach. Human beings, it is assumed, have certain rights based simply on their existence: such rights as food, clothing, shelter, health care, access to jobs. Discussions often concentrate on membership (in a community) social and economic inequalities, and the minimal rights of

individuals. As academic as these topics sound, this perspective is often the one most strongly embraced by students, who generally mistrust power. Often, their service experiences with disadvantaged youth, homeless persons or the elderly reinforce this mistrust.

The type of learning valued in a class or program examining poverty, for example, would be that most individuals or families are homeless because they have experienced three closely related "accidents": I became ill, lost my job and my spouse left me. The point in this is that it could happen to any of us, and that we are inherently no better or worse than others, despite our social status. This type of lesson would be driven home through service experiences that brought students into relationship or dialogue with homeless persons and agencies serving them (shelters, kitchens, advocates, etc.)

In programs looking at long-term solutions to homelessness, remedies might be sought that address the "root causes" of poverty. Several campuses, for example, have helped to set up phone answering services for homeless people as a way of helping them apply for jobs. The tension between short term care and long-term change would be an ongoing topic of discussion. Being a citizen, in this context, means finding ways to protest abuses of power and to alter the systems of power that lead to artificial and humanely untenable inequities.

A social justice orientation often emerges in mentoring programs, as well. Poverty gains a human face when a mentor drops a "buddy" off at a dangerous, substandard residence where the parent has been unemployed for 18 months and regularly abuses alcohol and occasionally the child. "Why that child and not me?" the student asks, "Why do we allow that to exist?"

Answering these questions in an academic context would require exploration of economics, the psychology of poverty, the rights of children, the relationship of public (welfare, social service agencies) and private (family, parent). Texts might include Michael Walzer's Spheres of Justice, the Nichomachean Ethics, Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the writings of scholars such as Clarke Chambers, Gisella Knopka and Hannah Arendt, or heroes such as Martin Luther King or Gandhi. Beyond these, selections would likely be topical, such as Jonathan Kozol's Rachel and Her Children or Elie Weisel's Sanctuary.

Power from a social justice perspective is often understood as oppositional, and oppressive, rather than as creative or shared. It is a concept to be understood historically as a tool with which "ups" control "downs." Politics in this regard is viewed as a human system of distribution, or political economy, and the practical question, generally, is how to manage the redistribution of limited goods to achieve a just society.

Service as Citizenship

Finally, service can itself be seen as the defining act of citizenship and the essential building block of community. To serve and to be a citizen are consistent and synonymous acts. Of primary interest from this perspective is the relationship of individual and community. There are two major points of departure for this understanding: the emphasis placed in American democracy on voluntary associations, as described by Tocqueville; and Robert Greenleaf's concept of "servant-leadership."

A primary challenge, from this point of view, is connecting students to people and institutions that will help them sustain their commitment to service over a lifetime. A solid program would involve students in a long-term commitment at a homeless shelter, for example. They would be encouraged to develop relationships with the people staying at the shelter, and to understand the context in which the shelter existed. Concurrently, they would be challenged to explore their own values, to go, in Melville's phrase "another layer lower" into themselves. Journals and readings by Royce, Bellah, Dorothy Day, Jane Addams, Robert Coles or Parker Palmer would aid their learning. Outreach (community relationships) and "in-reach" (self-exploration) would combine to lead students to understand how they might best serve and how their own lives might be most enriched.

In Democracy in America, Tocqueville devoted a chapter to the "unique American custom" of voluntarism, which fueled governance and provided the decentralized, popular basis for participation in public life. To be a citizen, therefore, is to participate actively in the voluntary organizations that are the visible symbols of community: Parent Teacher Organizations, Chambers of Commerce, VFW Posts, churches, part-time political offices, town meetings.

More recently this perspective has been explored in terms of the "Good Society," as described by Robert Bellah, (Habits of the Heart) or

the Russian philosopher Morab Mamarshadvili (The Mind of Mamarshadvili, edited by Bernard Murchland). Civil Society, as Mamarshadvili suggests, is an idea "which took root with the rise of modern democratic theory to denote a sphere of associative activity on the part of citizens, not under control of the state. . . civil society is based on a belief that by trusting people to pursue their own interests a symmetry will develop between the private and the public world, that our free actions will converge for the common good."

"Servant leadership" is a term coined by Robert Greenleaf in 1970. The most meaningful question one can ask, he maintains, is, "How can I serve?" Greenleaf arrived at his understanding of servant leadership through his experience as a human resources executive with AT&T, and from his reading of Herman Hesse's Journey to the East. "[T]o me," he concludes, "this story clearly says - *the great leader is seen as servant first . . .* .The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (His emphasis)

At its best, Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership asks that we allow ourselves to be served. The result is a set of interdependent, "communal" relationships. Loyalty to people and values emerges from these relationships, and it is this loyalty (and what philosopher Josiah Royce earlier called "loyalty to loyalty") which knits together a democratic political system. Such loyalty is often expressed in terms of "caring for" others and for the integrity of communities.

This framework is often initially perceived as non-political because it is little concerned with power or with formal state or governmental relationships. This critique overlooks two important lessons contained in the better models of this sort. Service as citizenship begins with an assumption of purpose: that we must care for others (as a way to our own growth). And it teaches that one approaches public life, or the civil society, with an attitude of service - loyalty to values and the people served. What was worthy of Tocqueville's comment is an article of faith for Greenleaf: citizenship begins with the individual decision to serve others.

This model resonates with students engaged in service-learning because it explicitly raises questions of meaning and life purpose, and asks how they will live "authentically," with integrated values

and actions. Service is seen as an antidote to what Alasdair MacIntyre calls, in After Virtue, the "bureaucratic individualism" of modern society, in which one remains loyal to an institution only so long as it fits narrow self-interest. Service suggests to students that they can create and sustain community - voluntary associations of mutual caring - rather than simply "consuming" the "products" of public institutions. Denying someone the opportunity to serve, in this context, is equivalent to denying them citizenship. Those who view service as citizenship take to heart Martin Luther King's maxim that "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve."

Value is placed, as well, on the concept of moral courage: the ability to act on what one understands to be right in a context intentionally or unintentionally designed to keep one from acting. Social problems exist because individuals defer responsibility and act outside an ethic of service.

Summary

Clearly, what I am describing are theoretical types. Most programs and classes practice some mixture of these types. Indeed, the value of concrete experience in service learning is that the experience can contain multiple, and sometimes paradoxical meanings. As educators, however, we tend to value one type over the others, and teach primarily from our own perspective.

I think often of the observation made by the Quaker theologian Thomas Kelly, who observed that "individual experience leads to social passion." Our objective, whatever our orientation to citizenship, is to build such bridges. We begin, as well, with a loose but important consensus, variously articulated as it may be, on the inherent worth of the individual person: citizenship is a birthright, not an earned privilege, in all of our understandings of democracy.

For my own part, I find value in all four models, and would seek ways to integrate them. What can the tradition of servant leadership teach citizen politics about purpose and clarity of commitment? How just would a society be in which everyone could and did serve? How are service and obligation related? What would it mean to have serious public discussions about distributive justice, and to collectively have enough facility with the concept that we could bring it to bear on issues such as national health care? How can citizen politics lend its entrepreneurial energy, understanding of conflict and practical orientation to democratic practice on a national scale?

The models share, I think, three elements that would be intentionally developed in an ideal program or classroom: teaching how to articulate one's "self" in a public context; lowering the perceived (what right do I have to speak up?) and real (I don't know how the system works) barriers to participation in public life; and developing the capacity for thinking strategically. As we attempt to develop these elements, we would do well to teach *from* the experiences of our students, rather than from our theories of citizenship, drawing attention to the insights offered by each perspective as they help to make sense of democratic practice.

Select Bibliography for Service-Learning and Civic Education

Terrence Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson, **Political Innovation and Conceptual Change** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Benjamin R. Barber, **Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

_____, **An Aristocracy of Everyone**, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1992).

Robert Bellah, et al, **Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Harry Boyte and Sara Evans, **Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

_____, **Commonwealth: a Return to Citizen Politics** (New York: Free Press, 1989).

Rebecca Breuer and Fraser Nelson, **Building Ownership: A Coach's Guide to Teaching Politics**, (Minneapolis: Project Public Life, 1992).

Craig Calhoun, editor, **Transformation of the Public Sphere** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

John Dewey, **The Public and its Problems** (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954).

Williamson M. Evers, **National Service, Pro and Con**, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990).

Paulo Freire, **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1989).

Lawrence Goodwyn, **The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America**, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Robert Greenleaf, **Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness**, (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

Thomas Jeavons, **Learning for the Common Good: Liberal Education, Civic Education and Teaching About Philanthropy**, (Washington D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991).

Frances Moore Lappe', **Rediscovering America's Values**, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

Suzanne Morse, editor, **Public Leadership Education: Preparing College Students for Their Civic Roles** (Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation, 1989).

Bernard Murchland, editor, **Higher Education and the Practice of Democratic Politics: A Political Education Reader**, (Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation, 1991).

_____, editor, "Special Issue: New Perspectives on Civic Education," **Civic Arts Review**, vol. 4, nos. 1-2, Winter Spring 1991.

Alexis de Tocqueville, **Democracy in America**, 2 vol. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969).