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Editorial

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Editorial

Virginia Jagla, PhD, National Louis University

Welcome to the second volume of Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement (SPACE). Providing the “space” for further reflection from our students is the fundamental tenet of this journal. The Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Consortium (SLCEC) offers this space to further advance civic engagement at our universities as we capture and promote the voices of our students experiencing diverse facets of civic learning. Our goal is to publish scholarly and reflective writing that enlightens service-learning and civic engagement practitioners and scholars about student experiences that extend beyond the classroom and into communities.

It is often said that a major goal of higher education is to develop civic-minded citizens with the skills and capabilities to lead our communities and nation (Dewey, 1916; Bowen, 1977; Astin, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Hurtado, Engberg, & Ponjuan, 2003). We concur with the renowned writers and researchers that “leveraging civic engagement for the mutual benefit of colleges and communities can be an effective strategy for realizing educational, civic, and economic outcomes” (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010, p. 4).

The power to produce, to sustain, and to transform arises from our innermost ethical core. Serving others brings forth our humanity, which is defined by our responsibility to care for other human beings. As a counterpoint of social escapism and nihilism, service-learning and other forms of civic engagement have the potential to transform student perspectives. It is essential to provide space for students to express their perceptions and viewpoints

Reed-Bouley (2002) offers the insight that students make meaning differently, perhaps, than do their faculty and community partners. Reed-Bouley cites the continuum model by Eyler and Giles (1999), which suggests movement along a line from a service orientation to a social justice orientation, and the paradigm model by Morton (1995), which in one instance likens service-learning to charity work. As faculty, we observe our students offering responses to service-learning and other forms of civic engagement and making meaning from a different stance than our own.

In a recent study, using interview data from faculty, students, and community partners (Jagla, Lukenchuk, Price, & Zilla, 2016), we expound on the importance of multiple perspectives regarding service-learning. Generally, our findings support the central role of university student development through teaching and learning using

service-learning pedagogy. It is in the means to that “end” that our respondents sometimes differ, reflecting the presence of broader service-learning approaches/models in their apparent beliefs, motivations, and goals. While we recognize the influence of a continuum model of transformational learning (e.g., Eyer & Giles, 1999) in our faculty members’ reflections, we also perceive aspects of a paradigm model of service-learning (e.g., Morton, 1995) in both our students’ and community partners’ reflections, as well as what may be described as a blending of service and justice from a spiritual standpoint in some of our student reflections (e.g., Reed-Bouley, 2002).

University student reflections on their engagement in service-learning projects depict a continuum from volunteerism to mutuality of service. While there is some description of “charity” work that may be deepened in the future, more often we see a transformative dimension, within which a spiritual component occasionally and uniquely emerges for students (e.g., putting oneself in another’s shoes as “a religious motivator”; “doing God’s work”). At times, these factors are concurrently present within the same individual’s discussion.

Within this volume we catch a glimpse of six students’ perspectives of their civically engaged work in university courses. We have three articles with perspectives of preservice teachers. Melissa Barone makes the case for progressive education as she describes her experiences in a foundational summer course entitled Problems, Issues, and Practices in Education. Barone advocates for progressive education in the middle grades in the form of a letter to her peers. A major thrust of her letter describes the Social Action Curriculum Project (SACP), which is a specific form of problem-based learning. SACP are specifically action-oriented and center on concerns of the classroom participants. Teacher candidates in the class were involved in the SACP in order to understand how to engage young adolescents in such projects in the future.

Another preservice teacher, Becky Kreidler, provides her perspective on community service through Loyola University’s Future Teachers Club (LFTC). Kreidler focuses on the relationship aspect of service. She divulges other LFTC members’ perceptions regarding various service projects. She helps us view the “ordinary things” we do as an accumulation of impactful community service. She says, “The small moments that have redefined my understanding of service have motivated me to always be active in my local community for the benefit of my students and their families.”

In their article, “Civic Education Training Promotes Active Learning with Real-World Outcomes,” Becci Burchett Gauna and Michelle Paul explain the state of Illinois mandate requiring a new civics course. Each civics course must include service-learning, controversial conversation, instruction regarding government institutions and procedures, and simulations. Gauna and Paul were preservice teacher candidates at the University of Illinois at Chicago and are now first-year teachers with Chicago Public Schools. As such, they were invited to participate in the Civic Education Summer Institute, hosted by the Service-Learning & Civic Engagement Consortium (SLCEC) at Loyola University Chicago. They describe their experiences “doing civics” in this inspiring two-day workshop.

Elizabeth Tabet explicates her service-learning experience at Chicagoland Methodist Senior Services in her article, “Activity Participation and Older Adults’ Well-

Being.” Tabet provides a thematic analysis of what she learned through her participation in the activities with the seniors. Her perspective on aging appears to have broadened, as the activities with the seniors provided her with newfound knowledge and understanding. She credits this experience with increased “personal and professional growth.”

In his article, “Using Self-Determination Theory to Improve College Access Among Minority Student Populations,” Tyler Smith expounds on his work with the University Center of Lake County (UCLC) in Illinois. The UCLC provides various college preparation programs meant to motivate and engage students from “underrepresented groups.” Smith facilitated many of these events and offers his perspective on the use of self-determination theory with the prospective college students. His extensive research on this theory, and reflection of using the ideas to motivate students, create a rich resource for understanding the possibilities of this motivational concept.

We hope you enjoy and are enriched by the conversations in this second edition of SPACE.

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