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Editors' Notes

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The Editor's Notes

I admit that I have struggled with the question of whether critical service-learning can truly transform students' lives?

Robert Sigmon's (1979) argued that service-learning should be grounded in a belief that "those who serve are also learners themselves and should be allowed significant control over their learning". But Sigmon balances this by arguing those being served should control the services provided *and* that those being served [community members] should be better able to serve as a result of service-learning. In short, all stakeholders should benefit from service-learning. David Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning, on the other hand, explores the importance of a 4-tiered learning experience that begins with a transformative experience and then guides learners into deep reflection. Learners consider whether their worldview and values change as a result of this experience and then they are asked to apply their new belief system into their everyday life. In short, learners experience change, and their transformative growth is driven through reflection.

But the cultural context within which service-learning takes place is also an imperative for consideration. According to the HEADSUP model (Andreotti, 2012), faculty and practitioners must consider whether critical service-learning is culturally competent. Service-learning *can* become ahistorical when it forgets the socio-cultural history within a community. Service-learning practitioners must acknowledge the overarching inequities that result from power, privilege, and oppression of marginalized populations on a systemic level. Critical service-learning must be seen as a critical tool to help our students examine the current systems of oppression and institutional marginalization that underlies community-based work and community-based learning. Classroom conversations regarding equity benefit students understanding of "difference". Critical service-learning can also provide faculty and practitioners opportunities to present exercises that can break social barriers, while providing community members with the tools to argue for their own equity on a community-level, on level of city or state level, and on the national level. We cannot ignore what critical service-learning brings to our pedagogy.

So perhaps our task, if we are concerned about our students' development, is to seek how we can find a balance in critical service-learning among three stakeholders: faculty, student, and community members. Faculty benefit in a myriad of ways: research, publishing and presenting papers for tenure and promotion, class engagement, and meeting course requirements as defined by one's department or college. Students benefits from the possibility of a transformative experience, becoming more civically engaged, and gaining a greater understanding of one's own

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and others' identities. Community members benefit by having their needs heard and explored, engaging in a project with tangible outcomes, and developing a rich, positive relationship between the campus and community. All three stakeholders must mutually benefit for service-learning to be considered a success according to Sigmon.

Before undertaking critical service-learning we must question our goals for students. Is it to reflect, and look at ways they can contribute through civic engagement to work on affecting social justice? Is our aim to have them write a critical analysis for a class and then go on their disengaged way? Is it ethical to have a semester-long project and leave the community only slightly better than we found it?

Kolb argues we should not go back to the way we were pre-service. We need to look then at how we can balance critical and transformative service-learning so students learn to incorporate a disposition toward civic engagement and how to participate in a democratic society. But we also need to look at how we can balance critical and transformative service-learning so community members learn to use tools to address social and economic inequities in their community, the tools to civically engage and the tools to participate in a democratic society.

This is no easy task because there is not set formula on how to do this and each "community" presents a different socio-historical context. But it should be incumbent for us to take this on.

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– Jamie Opdyke, MA –

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