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Service-learning courses can be powerful instruments for cognitive, affective, and moral transformation. This chapter examines the strengths and weaknesses of service-learning as an agent for cognitive, moral, and interpersonal development and its ability to promote civic or social engagement.

Pedagogy and Practice: Service-Learning and Students' Moral Development

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A monk asked Dong-shan: "Is there a practice for people to follow?" Dong-shan answered: "When you become a real person, there is such a practice."

—Gary Snyder, 1990, p. 185

There is a heady ferment in the scholarship on the pedagogy of service-learning. Researchers agree that service-learning courses can be powerful instruments for cognitive, affective, and moral transformation (Eyler and Giles, 1999). We are beginning to define best practices in the pedagogy of service-learning, most particularly around the role of reflective exercises in achieving the interlocking goals of such courses. Developmental theorists like Anne Colby argue that "Experiential learning, including service-learning, centrally acknowledges the context specificity of learning, providing educational settings that are less artificial than the classroom and much closer to the contexts in which students will later perform. When these settings are explicitly civic, as they are in service-learning . . . , they provide stronger support for moral and civic development than most lectures or seminars can" (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, p. 139).

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Careful studies are beginning to show, on the one hand, how service-learning works, and when, on the other hand, it can reinforce frozen attitudes and negative stereotypes (Eyler and Giles, 1999). The key, all agree, is using oral and written reflective exercises to connect cognitive inquiry with the experience of service in order to propel a lasting transformation on multiple levels. Defining reflection as the “intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives,” Julie Hatcher and associates (Hatcher, Bringle, and Muthiah, 2004, p. 38) weigh the empirical evidence for what kinds of reflective exercises work. “Specifically, reflection that is structured, regular and clarifies values *independently*,” they conclude, “contributed to the quality of the educational experience for students” (Hatcher, Bringle, and Muthiah, p. 42; emphasis in original).

All well and good. But in the different areas that service-learning courses are shown to be effective, what are the “particular learning objectives” to be sought? Toward what ends should the reflective exercises be directed? This becomes an especially tricky set of questions if we ask them with regard to students’ moral development. In what follows I will link an analysis of the different components of moral development and the kind of evolution that each requires with examples of oral and written exercises that serve to catalyze these processes in service-learning classes. I will also draw on the writings and reflections of students in recent service-learning classes to illustrate each component.

Moral Development: The State of the Art

In their recent massive update to their equally massive review of the research literature on how college affects students, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (2005) reaffirm their 1991 conclusion that “college is linked with statistical increases in the use of principled moral reasoning to judge moral issues. . . . However, the exact magnitude of the gain may not be as important as the movement from conventional to postconventional or principled judgment during college, which in itself is an important event in moral development (pp. 345–346). For many of those who seek to promote civic engagement, moral development is synonymous with this access to a “post-conventional” level of moral judgment that emphasizes the autonomous grasp of putatively universal moral principles focused on rights and justice. This understanding of moral development is rooted in the theory and pioneering work of Lawrence Kohlberg (1971, 1981, 1984). Kohlberg’s theory posited six stages of moral development that were irreversible, structural reorganizations of thinking about moral issues. Anne Colby states it this way: “As individuals move through the successive stages, their moral judgment moves from simple conceptions of morality grounded in unilateral authority and individual reciprocity to judgments grounded in shared social norms to an appreciation of a more complex social system to a perspective that is capable of evaluating the existing social system

in relation to more fundamental principles of justice” (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, pp. 103–104).

For obvious reasons Kohlberg’s emphasis on the cognitive component in moral development has been very attractive to educators. As Colby puts it, it is “impossible to divide moral and civic development sharply from intellectual or academic development because much of moral and civic development is intellectual” (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, p. 105; emphasis in the original). However, many scholars over the past quarter of a century have challenged not so much the substance of Kohlberg’s theory but its claims to uncover universal, cognitive-moral structures. Beginning with Carol Gilligan’s well-known charge of gender bias and her juxtaposition of an “ethic of care” to Kohlberg’s “abstract” ethic of procedural justice, scholars have questioned the cross-cultural validity and the concept of irreversible stages that are part and parcel of Kohlberg’s theory (Gilligan, 1982). As we will see shortly, the most important qualifications of Kohlberg’s theory are those that point out what Kohlberg himself acknowledged, namely, that reasoning toward moral judgment is only one component of moral development (Rest, Narváez, Bebeau, and Thoma, 1999).

From Charity to Justice

Before we pick up on this qualification, however, it is important to assess how service-learning courses have traditionally handled the issue of moral development at the course level. In workshop after workshop, as well as in much of the literature, I have heard faculty describe their learning goal relative to moral development as a shift in students’ consciousness from charity to social justice. Narratives such as that of teaching people to fish (or even assisting people in creating fish farms) versus providing them with fish—supplement Kohlberg in suggesting a unilinear evolution. Even Eyler and Giles (1999) frequently see the transformational power of service-learning in terms of a transition from “patronizing” charity to “a greater sense of the importance of political action to obtain social justice” (pp. 47, 135).

In the service-learning courses that I teach I, too, am concerned that students think systemically about the causes of injustice and that they frame their moral judgments based on such an analysis. Yet my students tell me repeatedly that it is the relationships that they enter into with inspiring community leaders, with immigrants struggling to learn English, with inner-city kids in after-school programs, and even long-distance relationships with embattled human rights workers in Latin America that are morally transformative. In a recent final reflection paper for an experiential study abroad and service-learning course, Andrea Barrera put it this way:

[The] power of relationships is often overlooked in daily activity, even in historic events. In order to accomplish a large change or transformation, there needs to be this stability of relationships. A voice is only as strong as

the relationships developed in order for it to be heard. A person can kick, scream, and march all around, but it is not until they actually work to formulate the relationships and build their credibility amongst a network, that people will be more likely to listen and want to help bring about change. Therefore, empowering others is essentially empowering the relationship. . . . I know what gets me going, and it is the people themselves, not the policy that we learned. I would rather get to know the people on the interpersonal level, and then, from there, make decisions on how to help. On the other hand there are people out there who do enjoy the policies and creating rules and regulations to help the people. By working together, people can effectively be heard, and change can occur.

Andrea could be seen as exemplifying Carol Gilligan's "ethic of care" and validating her argument. However, I want to suggest that what is truly illuminating in Andrea's reflection is her level of self-awareness ("I know what gets me going") and her realization that it takes networking among people who bring to bear a variety of cognitive skills, moral frameworks, and action orientations to create social change. Keith Morton's experience with his students has also led him to reject any dichotomy of charity and justice as a way of construing the moral field that is opened up by service-learning experiences. Learning from students like Andrea, Morton (2002) suggests that we look at different types of service (charity, community-empowering projects, and justice-oriented change processes) as representing different worldviews, each of which can lead to a moral development if plumbed in depth and with "integrity and courage" (p. 46).

The Components of a Moral Life

This brings us back to Kohlberg's stages. In my judgment, the most important evolution in post-Kohlbergian research focuses on the exploration of components of a moral life other than moral reasoning and judgment. Immediately, however, we run into the problem of a number of different ways of slicing the moral cake. While categories, terminology, and emphases differ, the cake looks pretty much the same. So, I will use the four-component model developed by James Rest and his associates. Keep in mind that each component of the moral life represents a process that must be undergone if moral development is to occur.

1. Moral *sensitivity* (. . . being aware that there is a moral problem when it exists)
2. Moral *judgment* (judging which action would be most justifiable in a moral sense . . .)
3. Moral *motivation* (the degree of commitment to taking the moral course of action . . .)

4. Moral *character* (persisting in a moral task . . .) [Rest, Narváez, Bebeau, and Thoma, 1999, p. 101; see also pp. 100–103 and Narváez and Rest, 1995]

As soon as we think of each of these components as a process, our view of moral development changes. Perhaps we should think of moral development as growing complexity and integration along multiple vectors rather than as a unilinear movement through fixed stages.

Moral Sensitivity. In one of my recent service-learning classes, Josh McCarty chose to volunteer at the Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN), an organization that supports human rights workers and advocates for social justice in Latin America. CRLN has devised an ingenious way of putting college students to work. It gives them case files of imprisoned or endangered human rights workers, asks them to research the case, and then write a letter in support of this actual person to heads of government, CEOs of multinational corporations, and others who have the power to alter the situation. DePaul students sign their own name to the letter with the title “Human Rights Assistant” underneath. At the first class session, Josh allowed that the proximity of CRLN’s office to his apartment and the opportunity to improve his writing skills were his primary motivations in his choice of a service placement. To be sure, this was not atypical of our pragmatic students and, in fact, I always stress that service-learning can be an important means to enhance career skills.

At our second class session, Josh came back with a different story. It was as if a light bulb in a dark room had been switched on. As he studied his first case file, he became aware that an actual human person’s life hung in the balance. This was not an opportunity to pursue his self-interest, but rather the person herself morally obligated Josh to write the best letter that he could whether or not it would alter the situation. Josh exhibited not only a keen moral sensitivity but combined it with a sense of moral seriousness. He moved from a utilitarian calculation to an internalization of his designated role as human rights advocate. In my experience, the situations themselves that we place students in when we teach service-learning classes have the power to evoke moral sensitivity and seriousness far better than concocting moral dilemmas or than my raising questions based on even the best readings.

Not always, however. In another service-learning class a premed student assigned to work as a teacher’s aide in an after-school program in an inner-city elementary school exploded in disgust after her first experience with her public school teacher: “She doesn’t even know what a femur is.” (You can imagine my instant panic as I furiously tried to dredge up memories of my high school biology.) It took most of the semester—and primarily the public school teacher’s active intervention to get her children and my student home safely when a gang battle loomed in the neighborhood—to get this student to broaden her grasp of another’s moral strengths. Because I involve students in weekly *oral* reflection sessions as part of the course, I

can also count on other students to challenge the morally insensitive rather than my assuming the pulpit of moral authority.

One clear danger in the development of moral sensitivity is that it will also inculcate a sense of moral superiority. We can imagine an all-knowing premed student saying something like, “The Chicago Public School system really does enforce a ‘savage inequality.’ Thank God I know what a femur is and am committed to making a difference.” Here the student defines herself as morally superior not only to the teacher, but to an entire school system and to her fellow premed majors who are not out there helping the poor, neglected children. So, in class we always do two kinds of exercises at various stages. First, we discuss what we are learning from the community leaders and the people we serve. In what concrete ways are we deeply indebted to them? Second, we counteract the tendency always to do a deficit analysis of the communities that we serve by spending one whole reflection session doing an asset-based analysis, in which we discuss nothing but the strengths of the communities and the people we serve.

Moral Judgment. Christina Ferrantelli’s family had a long history of involvement with the Salvation Army, so when she asked to do her service as a volunteer on a Salvation Army food truck, I readily agreed. Here is what Christina had to say in one of her reflection essays about her experience:

We handed out sandwiches and apples and juice to *anyone* who came up to the van. We fed prostitutes, pimps, kids, mechanics, moms, grandmas, homeless guys, crack addicts, and drug dealers. . . . After 4+ hours, I was exhausted and found myself looking forward to getting home. . . .

I don’t know about this. I don’t think I like this type of community service. It didn’t feel good. Well, it felt good to give the kids food knowing that they probably don’t have food at home. But no one’s life was changed. No one’s situation was changed. Perhaps, our feeding program helps people to not change their situation. . . . I also feel distinctly separate from the people that come to the van. *They* come to *our* van and *we* give *them* food. Then *they* go away and *we* go away. We’ve all got a sense of *us* and *them* and I don’t know how to even begin to go about breaking that down. Sometimes there was casual conversation between us. Sometimes there was hostile conversation. But there was never meaningful conversation. . . .

At first, I thought any changes that will take place on the south side must come from public policy. . . . There is a new [program] underway I just learned about from my public policy friend. He told me the area where the feeding program runs has been labeled an official empowerment zone. This means that millions of dollars will be poured into the south side and community members and business owners in the community decide where it will go and what it will be used for. I was skeptical when I heard this because so many similar programs have failed, precisely because they do not attack the real issue, which I believe is racism. I’m seeing its effects first hand. And experiencing racism within myself as I try not to see each person that approaches

our van as a crack addict. But, it looks to me like crack addiction on the south side is just another branch of the racism tree.

Clearly, Christina is involved in a complex process of moral reasoning, but it is something other than what Kohlberg's followers mean by reasoning based on moral principles and much closer to *phronesis*, or practical moral intelligence. Moral principles are involved, to be sure (See also MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 144–145, 151–152). Christina, for example, is quite clear about dichotomizing reasoning that separates humans into a *we* and a *they*. She thinks systemically about the root causes of poverty. Most important, she is engaged in a self-reflective act of moral judgment (“And experiencing racism within myself”). As Anne Colby and associates put it, “In real life moral dilemmas do not come neatly packaged like hypothetical dilemmas, which typically involve a given set of simple facts. Almost any real moral dilemma or question involves significant ambiguity. . . . Thus, in order to find meaning amid the moral ambiguity of real-life situations, people must develop habits of moral interpretation and intuition through which they perceive the everyday world” (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, p. 106).

Service-learning courses put students precisely in morally ambiguous contexts that challenge just about any moral framework. The most important consequence of Christina's reflections was that when she read a portion of her written reflections to the class, she, not I, put all of the issues of a course on religion and social justice on the table. Developing moral judgment in this approach becomes a collective wading through of all the ambiguities that Christina saw. To aid in this process, at one point in such a course I have the students interview a leader at the community organization where they are working, asking two questions: “What is your vision of a just society,” and “How do we get there?” Then I ask the students to compare the responses with their own. “Habits of moral interpretation” are found through an interactive dialectic of alternative frameworks rather than as a serial development through stages.

Moral Motivation. The literature on moral motivation as a developmental process stresses that the motivation to act on one's moral judgment depends essentially on the degree to which being moral becomes a core part of one's identity (Blasi, 1993, 1995). At some point not to act at all and not to act morally become a violation of one's true self. From this point of view, asking students what they have learned about themselves through their service becomes an important reflective exercise.

Much of the literature on people who act in a crisis suggests that the shift from a moral judgment to moral action appears to them as utterly ordinary. Samuel and Pearl Oliner's studies of rescuers of Jews during World War II indicated that the act of rescue “was less a decision made at a critical juncture than a choice prefigured by an established character and way of life” (Oliner and Oliner, 1988, p. 222). However, the shift toward action

in younger adults whose identity is still under formation requires both an act of moral imagination and a sense of personal agency.

The right moral action may seem like simply connecting the dots, but leaping from a series of points to a line is a qualitative transformation. Ben Nowicki performed that leap for the entire class of students who had studied the social conditions of third-world poverty on the border of Mexico and Arizona with three DePaul professors. While on the border, we had visited a Fair Trade coffee cooperative in Agua Prieta, Sonora, called Just Coffee. The cooperative linked farmers in Chiapas growing coffee with their fellow villagers who had traveled north in search of work. In Agua Prieta the immigrants grind and roast the coffee beans on buyers' demand and ship the coffee ultra-fresh to customers in the United States. Ben envisioned how students in Chicago could become another link in the chain. He and virtually the entire class researched the literature on Fair Trade and developed their own marketing materials, formed a connection with a local distributor of Fair Trade coffee, segmented the Chicago area, and fanned out in groups to reach every coffee shop in the city.

For Cara Joyce the act of imagination was also an act of self-empowerment. The new possibilities for action and being were brought home to her through her service with an advocacy group that is committed to a Freirean style of popular education (Freire, 1971):

Of all of the ideas for social change that I was exposed to . . . I think that I have learned the most about what is possible and what is within anyone's grasp at the Interfaith Worker Rights Center. They use the model of popular education to help workers create their own unions, demand benefits and fair wages, and improve their own skill set and attractiveness to employers in their own community. . . . I have only been at the center for a few weeks and feel like I'm just scratching the surface of what their ambitions are and what they get done, but the idea of linking one's personal experience with the larger social systems through education is an amazing tool. . . . If this experience did empower me in any way, I am glad that it showed me that my limits are not as hard-wired and concrete as I thought they were, and that some of my preconceived notions of a good job and a good life need some more examination.

A sense of agency, then, is also critical for the transition to action. Again, the Oliners state it directly: "Rescuers felt that they could control events and shape their own destinies. . . . Rather than regarding themselves as mere pawns . . . , they . . . perceived themselves as actors, capable of making and implementing plans and willing to accept the consequences" (1988, p. 177). It is often the case, as it was for Cara, that the people whom our students serve who are part of active community organizations manage to communicate to students that they too can be agents of change (see, for example, Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, pp. 122–123).

To assist in this process, we do several kinds of reflective exercises in my service-learning classes. "Taking Stock" is one exercise that we do at midterm. Students answer frankly what their most important learning experiences have been and where they are still struggling conceptually. They discuss what kinds of brick walls they have encountered in their service context. I post these without names attached on our electronic discussion board and ask students to assist one another. Developing a sense of community, I have found, enhances the sense of individual agency.

Moral Character. Moral development along this fourth vector in service-learning classes for younger adults lacks one essential component—time. Character is formed over decades, not months. It is important to be modest about one's expectations for a single service-learning class. If liberal education along the entire span of a college career, including various opportunities for experiential education, were a networked process, we might be able to see clearer signs of impact in facilitating a self-determined process of character development. For this to happen the key moral question that would have to be addressed in a variety of ways across the curriculum would be not, "What is the right thing to do?" but "Whom shall I become?" As it stands, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conclude that there is little longitudinal evidence to confirm what, if any, impact college has on moral character.

Colby and her associates take a more optimistic view by discussing how the formation of identity and character are connected. Colby cites longitudinal studies of those who have had powerful learning experiences during their college years, such as the Freedom Riders of 1964: "You learned too much [in Mississippi]," Colby quotes one veteran as saying, "to go back to what you were doing before. . . ." (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, pp. 188–189). Students like Andrea, Josh, Ben, and Cara who have lived and studied along the border and have engaged in service learning in Chicago as part of their response to what they experienced in Mexico (at DePaul we discuss linking the global to the local) speak the same language as those Freedom Riders. Can we say, then, that moral identity is the DNA for a moral character that evolves over time and in confronting many different challenges?

At this point I suspect some readers may well be asking, "What business is it anyway for colleges to be forming particular moral characters?" My answer is five-fold. First, all education, to the degree that it has any impact, is character forming. Even the most value-neutral course conveys the value of rational inquiry as a guiding principle in human life. Second, if we as educators are always implicitly affecting students' moral development across its four components, we ought to become conscious explicitly of how we are doing so. Third, the liberal arts, as I understand them, are in the business of liberating the potential of students to actualize the good as well as the true and the beautiful. Fourth, openness to a plurality of visions of the good and enabling students to examine alternative visions critically are key to this liberation. Fifth, service-learning courses do not, in fact, lead to

uniform visions of the good or to a linear moral development. While their visions of social ills and social justice and the levers of social change may overlap, the students that I have quoted have begun to form their own distinct social perspectives and characters. Andrea, grounded in her self-understanding, sees networked communities built on strong personal relationships as the key to social change. Josh, stemming in part from his human rights work, argues for a counterculture of resistance. Ben, influenced by socially engaged Buddhism, wants to create a “culture of radical awakening” in which “the process of uncovering myself is directly linked to understanding the reality of life for others.” Christina probes the roots of racism. And Cara calls for a Freirean form of education exercised inside the campus walls but also in solidarity with struggling workers and migrants. Linear moral development toward a preconceived end simply is not an option in a multiply diverse college classroom even were it a desired goal.

Practice and the Art of Cathedral Building

From a longtime antipoverty worker, Anne Colby draws a metaphor for the kind of civic engagement that service learning hopes to catalyze. This activist “compared himself to the cathedral builders, chipping away at social problems the way stone masons of the Middle Ages inched along in building cathedrals, knowing that the massive churches would not be finished for three or four hundred years” (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003, p. 123). This is a very difficult understanding to convey to students. Students do grasp intuitively that to become good at anything requires time and practice, practice, practice. However, there is an expanded, moral definition of a practice implicit in this metaphor of cathedral builders. Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) presents the classic definition of such a practice: “By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goals involved are systematically extended” (p. 175).

Stated more simply in terms relevant to our discussion, a practice is the engine of a process that leads from a moral identity to a moral character. A practice, I believe, is also a process that unifies the four components of a moral life.

In a genuine practice one’s own core self is always at stake. If we set MacIntyre’s definition against the Buddhist epigraph that opened this chapter, we came face-to-face with a paradox: one needs to become a real person, a person of moral integrity and commitment, to find a practice, but a practice is the means by which the internal goods of any activity are reached and the internal good of the self as distinct from its instrumental objectives is generated.

There are many ways in which a service-learning course can instigate a practice. For Josh, writing human rights letters became a practice virtually instantly when he realized that a real person's life was at stake. The instrumental good of improving his writing skills became encapsulated in the internal good of advocating for human rights, "speaking truth to power." Of course, as I have said, a practice takes practice over longer periods of time than a semester.

Practice and Liberation

Martha Nussbaum (1997), drawing from Seneca, argues that historically there have been two conceptions of a liberal education. Both revolve around the word *liberalis*, or "fitted for freedom," as Nussbaum translates it. Fitted for freedom can refer to the initiation of an elite into the traditions of their society, or, as Seneca intended, it can mean the production of free men and women, free "because they can call their minds their own" (p. 293). Again relying on Seneca, Nussbaum sees cultivating humanity as opting for the second meaning while honoring the traditions revered by proponents of the first meaning by critically appropriating those traditions. Such cultivation requires transcending the perspectives and allegiances of one's group and addressing a plurality of visions and traditions both within and outside of one's own cultural location (Nussbaum, 1997). Ultimately, for "cathedral builders," it requires some sense of the transcendent worth of work and action that of necessity will span generations (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens, 2003).

There are no twenty-five easy lessons for cultivating humanity in ourselves and others. It requires practice and, arguably, a practice. Nor, as critics of development theories rightfully suggest, is there an irreversible progression along a linear path to a definable goal (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, pp. 48–51). Rather, as Gary Snyder (1990), echoing Zen masters, puts it, "practice is the path." Practice "*puts you out there* where the unknown happens, where you encounter surprise" (p. 153; emphasis in the original). The argument for service learning as one pedagogy of engagement can be summarized in Snyder's phrase: it puts students and their teachers out there. It upsets cognitive and moral frameworks, broadens the heart's constrained habits, and enlivens our moral imagination and sense of agency. It challenges our core sense of self. In so doing it energizes the starfish to move along all of its vectors. It is a first step toward the practice that happens when you become a real person.

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