

Conceptualizing Criticality as a Guiding Principle for High Quality Academic Service Learning

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Recent service-learning literature proposed a dichotomous framework for understanding service learning as either traditional service learning or critical service learning. Within this proposal, critical service learning is differentiated from traditional service learning as emphasizing social change, working to redistribute power, and seeking to develop authentic relationships, while traditional service learning does none of these. Traditional service learning is described as being of lower quality, more often resembling a charitable approach to engaging students with the community, without attention to the role of inequality in the social system, thereby presenting dangers to the community and the students that clearly outweigh the benefits. Rather than adopt the traditional vs. critical service learning paradigm that has been proposed, we suggest that criticality be considered in the construction of all service-learning courses and that faculty consider thoughtfully the level of criticality that is appropriate within a given course and academic discipline. Further, we suggest that criticality might be increased through more fully integrating critical thinking into service-learning courses.

As universities prepare students for life in the 21st century, equipping them to understand and navigate issues of diversity and inequality in society becomes imperative due to increasing diversity and socioeconomic polarization within our own borders as well as increasing communication and interdependence globally (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2007; Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012). Developing effective pedagogies to accomplish these goals becomes paramount within this context, and service learning has been touted by many as one such pedagogy. Since the 1970s, service learning has been practiced in a variety of forms and within diverse disciplines with research on its effects suggesting that students who participate in service learning are more likely (a) to develop a stronger pluralistic orientation (Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012); (b) “to confront notions of prejudice, be inclusive of views different from their own, and embrace social justice” (Finley, 2011, p. 17; see also Densmore, 2000; Hurtado, 2009; Zuniga, Williams, & Berger, 2005); (c) to express tolerance of, and appreciation for, diversity (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jay, 2008; Krain & Nurse, 2004; Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fisher, 2010; Marullo, 1998); (d) to reduce stereotyping (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hirschinger-Blank, Simons, & Kenyon, 2009; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002; Simons & Cleary, 2005); (e) to develop a deeper understanding of social issues (Jones & Hill, 2001; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993); (f) to exhibit greater racial understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998); (g) and to “move from awareness to critical consciousness” (Davi, 2006, p. 92). Since service learning’s inception there have been on-going debates regarding which forms of service learning yield the greatest benefits to student learning and community well-being. Much of the research on service learning seeks to answer this important question through

empirical evidence. As faculty who have taught service-learning courses for a collective total of nearly 50 years, we too have given considerable attention to this question as it has pertained to our service-learning teaching and course development. As service-learning leaders on our campus, we have had countless opportunities to discuss this question with colleagues from nearly every academic discipline as they developed their own service-learning courses and scholarly agendas. Through this process, we have come to appreciate a wide range of service-learning practices as potentially valuable to both student learning and community well-being.

Recent scholarship regarding the strengths and weaknesses of various forms of service learning suggests that critical service learning is the most beneficial approach, while raising concerns about “traditional” service learning as potentially causing harm rather than contributing positively to higher education’s accomplishment of its civic mission (Chesler, 1995; Cooks, Scharrer, & Paredes, 2004; Mitchell, 2008; Wade, 2001). Mitchell (2008), for example, proposed a framework for differentiating these two models for service learning. According to this framework, three key elements differentiate critical service learning from its traditional counterpart. Critical service learning (a) takes a social change orientation, (b) works to redistribute power, and (c) seeks to develop authentic relationships. Traditional service learning is defined by the absence of these characteristics. Advocates of critical service learning express concern that traditional service learning carries risks, such as reinforcing stereotypes and bolstering the privileged status of students in relation to the community. Therefore, they suggest that critical service learning should be embraced as a more effective method of community engagement (Chesler, 1995; Mitchell, 2008; Wade, 2001).

Advocates of critical service learning have made a positive contribution to service-learning literature and practice by articulating what critical service learning is and how it might best be implemented. They have also reminded practitioners of the potential pitfalls in service learning. However, their ideas also raise a number of important questions that merit consideration by service-learning scholars and practitioners. These questions include:

1. What is traditional service learning? Why is the term “traditional” used to describe the type of non-critical service learning depicted by critical service-learning advocates? In what sense and to what extent is non-critical service learning, traditional?
2. To what extent can critical service learning be practiced across the service-learning paradigms previously proposed in the service-learning literature? (e.g., see the Morton, 1995 discussion of charity, project, and social change)
3. To what extent is the emphasis on critical service learning in accord with the current value placed on the practice of service learning across the disciplines? Similarly, to what extent can critical service learning practice address community needs as identified and expressed by diverse community members?
4. How do critical service-learning practices fit within higher education’s mission to develop students’ critical thinking skills?

Why Traditional Service Learning?

Though critical service learning has been discussed by many scholars (Chesler, 1995; Diemer, Voight, & Mark, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Wade, 2001), a particularly comprehensive description of critical service learning as a model distinct from traditional service learning is offered most clearly in Mitchell’s (2008) article, “Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models.” Throughout the discussion traditional service learning is said to carry considerable risks and to be generally less desirable than is critical service learning as a form of community engaged pedagogy. Critical service learning is offered as an approach that minimizes the risks of traditional service learning by short circuiting the “stance of charitable pity that traditional volunteerism often produces” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 54). Highlighting distinctions between the two models, Mitchell (2008) asserted that “without the exercise of care and consciousness, drawing attention to root causes of social problems, and involving students in actions and initiatives addressing root causes, service learning may have no impact beyond students’ good

feelings” (p. 51). Consistent with this theme, traditional service learning has been described as focusing on “services to individuals” rather than “service for an ideal” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 51). Although traditional service learning is not defined, examples of traditional service learning offered in the article are consistently of a direct service nature, such as feeding the homeless or tutoring children, rather than addressing social and political issues associated with these concerns. For the most part, Mitchell (2008) described traditional service learning in terms of what it is not rather than clearly describing what it is.

Throughout the article, several broad generalizations are made regarding prevailing service-learning practice, presumably falling within the traditional service-learning model, but no supporting evidence is provided for these generalizations. The following quotes illustrate this concern. Quoting Wade (2001), Mitchell (2008) asserted, “*Rarely* [emphasis added] do students in service-learning programs consider whether some injustice has created the need for service in the first place” (p. 1). Similarly she cited Chesler (1995) as stating, “As students fit into prescribed agency roles for their service work they *typically* [emphasis added] do not challenge the nature and operations or quality of these agencies and their activities” (p. 130). Further, Cipolle (2004) was cited as stating, “Students are *often* [emphasis added] unprepared for the service learning experience” and specifically lack knowledge and understanding of the people being served (p. 20). Mitchell (2008) expanded on this theme, stating that agencies, too, are

often [emphasis added] unprepared for service-learning with unclear expectations for students’ service and time, with limited understanding of what service-learning is, and (sometimes) without an accurate understanding of the history, knowledge, skills, and experiences of the students coming to serve. (p. 60)

The practices described in these assertions are less than ideal, and therefore service-learning practitioners are well-advised to be aware of them as potential pitfalls in their work. All of these practices no doubt have occurred and continue to occur in service learning to some extent. However, there has not been sufficient research to date to document the frequency with which any of these practices occur, so it is impossible to assert with confidence which practices occur rarely or often. Because it is impossible to make such generalizations with confidence in the absence of sufficient data on prevailing service-learning practices, the descriptor of “traditional” does not seem to be an appropriate one if it is being used to imply that these practices are typical or normative within the service-learning field.

An alternative understanding of the term “traditional” as describing practices that have been passed down from earlier times through multiple generations is also problematic in that this view is not easily reconciled with what we know about service learning’s history. An examination of the earliest service-learning pioneers reveals that they valued the importance of critical reflection in all forms of service-learning practice and did not support the practices that are described as components of traditional service learning. The definition of service learning, as distinct from volunteerism/charity, emphasizes the importance of critical reflection as evidenced in Bringle and Hatcher’s (1995) oft-cited definition, which described service learning as

a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

Kendall (1990), a service-learning pioneer and former executive director of the National Society for Experiential Education, wrote more than twenty years ago, “a good service-learning program helps participants see their [service] questions in the larger context of issues of social justice and social policy—rather than in the context of charity” (p. 20). Similarly, Sigmon (1979) outlined three principles of service learning that reflect a strong connection with critical service learning’s commitment to redistribute power among those involved in service learning when he asserted that

(a) those being served control the service(s) provided; (b) those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; and (c) those who serve are also learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned. (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 3)

Though the pioneers’ views reflect many of the elements of critical service learning, they varied among themselves in their primary goals for engaging in service-learning practice. Pollack (1999) identified 33 service-learning pioneers and explains that they were quite varied in their motivations for service-learning practice. He described the following three distinct “axes” of motivation among the pioneers and the key concern that informed each: (a) social justice (focusing on social change), (b) democratic education (preparing students for effective, democratic engagement), and (c) education’s

service to society (ensuring that education serves society’s needs). Pollack described the pioneers’ thought as “debates along the axes” (p. 19). This history conveys clearly the divergent conceptualizations of service learning’s mission among its earliest practitioners. Pollack (1999) affirmed this divergent thought in saying, “Like beauty, service is a many-splendored thing. Its value is in the eye of the beholder” (p. 12). The service-learning pioneers too affirmed the divergent views among themselves and sought to develop a *big tent* approach that was inclusive and built upon common values, principles, and language. Among others expressing this view, Jane Kendall (as cited in Stanton et al., 1999) perhaps expressed this best when she said,

Even though people come to service-learning from different values, whether it’s civic participation or social justice, academic learning or career development, international or cross-cultural learning—all the different parts—the principles are still the same. But because they use different language, it’s very hard for them to talk to each other. . . [It’s] important to bridge some of those gaps. (p. 214)

Thus if we consider the ideas of the service-learning pioneers to be service learning’s historical tradition, there is evidence that their work included a wide range of practice and thought, including the views about social justice that are central to the proposed critical service learning model. Moreover, through their big tent approach to defining the field, they passed down a commitment to inclusivity and to identifying common ground among divergent views rather than narrowing the definition to “either-or” thinking or “versus” terminology.

Given the difficulties with the traditional label, it seems more appropriate to consider the two models discussed by Mitchell (2008) simply as critical vs. non-critical service learning. Conceptualizing criticality in this way is not only more precise and accurate, but also presents possibilities for the synthesis of critical service learning with other earlier models of service learning that have been proposed.

Critical Service Learning Across Paradigms

Mitchell’s (2008) proposal of two models in service learning evokes consideration alongside Morton’s (1995) proposal of three service-learning paradigms: charity, project, and social change. Charity is defined as “the provision of direct service where control of the service remains with the provider” (Morton, 1995, p. 21) The Project Model is “focus[ed] on defining problems and their solutions and implementing well-conceived plans for achieving

those solutions” (Morton, 1995, p. 21). Social change, Morton (1995) suggested, “typically focus[es] on process: building relationship among or within stakeholder groups, and creating a learning environment that continually peels away the layers of . . . root causes” (p. 22).

While at first glance Mitchell’s (2008) critical service learning might be considered synonymous with Morton’s (1995) social change paradigm, closer thought suggests that criticality might be incorporated into all three of the paradigms to varying degrees. From this perspective, criticality resides, not in the nature of the work being done in the community, but in the manner in which it is conceived, implemented, and intellectually processed. Additionally, within this perspective, criticality might be thought of as existing along a continuum rather than as a binary, all-or-nothing model in its own right. In keeping with the continuum approach, each of critical service learning’s three key elements—(a) working to redistribute power, (b) developing authentic relationships in the classroom and in the community, and (c) working from a social change perspective—might be thought of as varying

along a continuum, somewhat independently of one another (see Table 1).

Drawing on this perspective, criticality can be integrated theoretically with all three of Morton’s (1995) approaches. Charity- and project-based service learning, while not focused explicitly on social change work, might be high or low in criticality depending upon the nature of the relationships, the attention to power dynamics and the extent to which participants consider root causes and social change issues pertinent to the service. The social change paradigm, despite its obvious focus on social change, might also vary in its degree of criticality. Morton explains that work within all three paradigms can be done with or without depth and integrity. He suggests that social change work at its “thinnest” can be “only rhetorical, narrowly selfish, and against a wide range of offenses without offering alternatives” (p. 28). Moreover, social change work in service learning can and does vary in terms of the authenticity of participants’ relationships, the attention to power dynamics in the service learning and classroom settings, and the extent to which committed action for social change is integral to the experience.

Table 1

Examples of Morton’s Service-Learning Models Along the Criticality Continuum

	Lower criticality*	Higher criticality**
Charity	Students provide tutoring in a school, while applying the teaching concepts that they have learned in an Education course, with no examination of how the students or themselves relate to the larger complicated social picture with the political pressures and inequalities at play.	Students provide tutoring in a school. While applying teaching concepts they learn in an education course, they also deeply engaging with race, class and gender awareness, analysis of the systems at play (e.g., political, educational structure, funding), organizing a complex, multi-layered, systemic analysis of the community and its relationship to the community’s need, and offering a social action plan to help the school better address the students’ needs. In future semesters, students may secure funding and implement the social action plan.
Project	Students develop a website for a non-profit organization	Students develop a website or an organizational newsletter for a non-profit agency partner, after learning the in-depth history of the organization, and the complexities of their relationship with the community in terms of various dimensions of race, class and gender, political power, etc.
Social change	Students rally for a cause without fully understanding the issues underlying the need for the change (e.g., distribute flyers, demonstrate at a rally)	Students develop authentic relationships with a community partner that has a history of ongoing effort to affect change, actively advocating on an issue; they pay close attention to power dynamics and social change concerns, and after having done so, they implement their own means of working for social change around the related issue.

Note. *Lower criticality: Students provide a service, product, or person power for a cause, without examining the underlying social issues related to the need. **Higher criticality: Students engage in learning through service work, product development, or person power for a cause, while deeply examining the social issues and inequalities related to the need within the community.

Therefore, we suggest that critical service learning is best conceptualized as a variable (i.e., criticality) to be thoughtfully addressed in the design of each and every service-learning experience (whether charity, project, or social change in nature) rather than as a distinct model in and of itself.

Implications for Service Learning Across the Curriculum

If critical analysis of social problems and societal structures must occupy a central position in high-quality service learning, as critical service learning proponents suggest, an important question is raised as to whether service learning is advisable across a wide array of academic disciplines. Faculty in most disciplines are not (at least by virtue of their disciplinary training) equipped to engage in critical social analysis with their students. In similar fashion, course goals and student learning outcomes in courses of various disciplines do not include this type of analysis due to the very nature of the disciplines and related curriculum. If a high level of criticality is considered to be a necessary condition for high-quality service learning, faculty in many disciplines will likely and reasonably conclude that service learning is an inappropriate pedagogy for them to employ in their courses. Mitchell (2008) began to address this concern by pointing out that faculty who do not have skills in critical analysis might be well-advised to co-teach their courses with a faculty member who has that expertise. While this may be one possible path forward, it is reasonable to expect that there also are faculty who do not perceive this emphasis on social critique to be central to the learning goals of their courses or within the range of expertise of their disciplines. These faculty, in all likelihood, will decline the team teaching option and may instead choose not to incorporate service learning into their courses.

The findings of Buzinski et al. (2013) reinforced this view. Through their research on faculty from the humanities; the Behavior and social sciences; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); and the applied professions, these researchers found substantial disciplinary differences in the language faculty use to discuss service learning and civic engagement; their conceptualizations of these practices; and their motivations for, and concerns about, incorporating these practices into their teaching and scholarship. Based on their findings, Buzinski et al. (2013) suggested that civic engagement and service learning cannot be presented in “one size fits all” language. Rather, such pedagogies “need to be promoted through language that resonates with different disciplinary identities” (Buzinski et al., 2013, p. 62). They concluded, “In light of these findings, a

universalized approach to the incorporation of civic engagement or servicelearning may be ill-advised” (Buzinski et al., 2013, p. 65).

A one size fits all approach is also contrary to service learning’s history and to the strong value on inclusivity that has been evidenced in the field to date. Since the inception of service learning, higher education has embraced the idea that service learning can and should be practiced across the disciplines. Numerous resources, organizations, and structures support the implementation of this idea. For example, the American Association of Higher Education produced a well-known monograph series to assist faculty in implementing service learning within their disciplinary teaching. These monographs address a wide range of disciplines in the liberal arts, STEM fields, and professional fields such as business, communication, education, and hospitality services (Zlotkowski, 2004). Additional resources for this purpose are available through National Campus Compact, the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, and various professional journals focused on academic service learning, such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning and Partnerships*. Beyond this set of publications, regional, national, and international conferences in diverse disciplines have included service-learning research and practice as a focus over the past 2 to 3 decades. Among the most well-known of these is the International Conference for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (www.researchslce.org). At this conference, faculty members present service-learning scholarship from fields as diverse as computer science, literature, and philosophy. Faculty awards are also in place to recognize the significant contribution that this work makes to both the academy and the partnering communities (e.g., the Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award and the Robert L. Sigmon Service-Learning Award). Faculty from a wide array of disciplines have been recognized through these awards. Beyond national and regional level supports, additional structural supports are now available on many campuses through internal service-learning offices that provide staffing and programming to assist faculty across the disciplines in integrating service learning into their courses.

The perspectives, expertise, and resources represented within the diverse academic disciplines of higher education provide avenues for productive work with communities in response to a wide range of concerns and for the benefit of all parties. Sigmon (1979) stated that when devising a service-learning feature for a course, community voice is the most critical component: the community “would control the agenda, educationally and work-wise. . . . Start there, because that’s where the creativity is; that’s where the

new knowledge is being created” (Stanton et al., 1999, p. 228). Community voices articulate a range of assets and challenges that universities might partner with constructively. These range from requests for direct service with client populations to engagement in advocacy work and community education, from community-based research to marketing campaigns and website creation, and from assistance with book drives to assistance with local environmental challenges. In short, community-identified needs and related requests are diverse. Narrowing the definition of high quality service learning to be inclusive only of critical service learning runs the risk of narrowing higher education’s ability to respond to a wide range of community needs.

Critical Service Learning and Students’ Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Research suggests that service learning can have a positive impact on student intellectual growth in areas such as complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Batchelder & Root, 1994; Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Osborne, Hammerich, Hensley, 1998; Vogelsang & Astin, 2000). Critical service learning’s strong orientation toward social justice (Chesler, 1995; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Mitchell, 2008; Wade, 2001) raises important questions about how to teach social justice content effectively. Butin (2011) articulated this concern well in his critique of service learning as an intellectual movement. In discussing “the myth of an agreed-upon justice” (p. 31) he stated,

[S]ervice-learning from a political perspective is undermined by a ‘critical dogmatism’ that leaves unquestioned its own foundational underpinnings that discount alternative perspectives. This is the mythical equivalence of ‘social justice’ as a neutral and already agreed-upon principle. From a political perspective, service learning is meant to function as a mechanism to move individuals from the (political) right to the (social justice) left. This is traditionally described as helping students move from individualistic to structural understandings of societal problems, and from passive acceptance to collective action. (p. 31)

Butin (2011) referred to this as a “regressive loop” that allows for no “exterior questioning” of the “agreed-upon social justice” (p. 32). This teaching approach seems to run counter to higher education’s broader mission to develop and strengthen students’ skills in critical thinking. The AAC&U promotes critical thinking as an important outcome of higher education

and provides a rubric for assessing students’ development in this area. This rubric defined critical thinking as “a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion” (AAC&U, n.d.).

Intellectual development theories, such as King and Kitchener’s (1994) Reflective Judgment Model, suggest that presenting individuals with perspectives that contradict their previously held views is an important component of intellectual growth (Goodman, 2011, p. 40). In this process, “we expect people to engage in critical thinking by examining assumptions, exploring various viewpoints, analyzing positions, engaging in self-reflection, and developing their own perspectives” (Goodman, 2011, p. 40). Similarly, social identity theory suggests that most people from privileged groups (currently the background of most college/university students in the United States) tend to accept the social structure that they have been reared within and also tend to accept the prevailing cultural beliefs and ideas that justify their group’s dominance (Goodman, 2011). Social identity theory suggests that after being presented with experiences and information that contradict their world view, individuals may move to a new stage of development in which they question their assumptions and gain new insights into societal injustices.

Taken together, these theories suggest that students are best served by faculty avoiding the presentation of an agreed upon understanding of social justice in the classroom and ensuring that students are challenged to consider views of the world that differ from their own. While teaching within the “regressive loop” is problematic, service learning seems undeniably well-positioned to raise important questions about social conditions, to confront students with diverse ideas about these conditions, and to engage them in considering and weighing evidence about conditions they encounter through their community engaged work. Critical thinking’s emphasis on “examining assumptions, exploring various viewpoints, analyzing positions, engaging in self-reflection, and developing [one’s] own perspectives” (Goodman, 2011, p. 40) is ideally suited for students’ thorough and authentic processing of their service-learning experiences in light of existing evidence and competing perspectives. In contrast, presenting students with an already agreed upon understanding of social justice fails to model the skills and practices of critical thinking and seems likely to trigger resistance and backlash from students who enter the classroom holding opposing views (Butin, 2011). Also within this context, students who enter the classroom with views that are consistent with the agreed upon social justice position are unlikely to experience the intellectual challenge of examining and critiquing their own views and underlying assumptions.

Conclusion

Advocates of critical service learning give voice to important concerns and cautions that all service-learning practitioners are wise to consider. They have also articulated a clear description of critical service learning as a means of circumventing these pitfalls. However, in articulating a binary traditional vs. critical service-learning model, they have defined criticality as distinct from a straw-man referred to as traditional service learning. We argue that the concept of traditional service learning, as it is described in the critical service-learning literature, is not a useful construct (Mitchell, 2008). We offer the alternative suggestion that service-learning practitioners and scholars consider the role of *criticality* in various approaches to academic service learning. Critical service-learning goals can be best served through conceptualizing criticality as a variable to be considered within all service-learning paradigms rather than as a discrete service-learning model.

In terms of pedagogy, we offer several suggestions for those considering the issue of criticality as it pertains to their service-learning courses as well as a case illustration. First, faculty must consider what level of criticality is appropriate and feasible for the particular service-learning course under consideration: to what extent is criticality appropriate within this particular course, within this discipline, with students at this level? To what extent is criticality appropriate to the learning goals of the course? We suggest that, depending upon the learning goals and the nature of the discipline, lower levels of criticality may be entirely appropriate. For example, accounting students might audit the financial records of a non-profit agency to learn the applicability of accounting techniques and methods without delving deeply into the social issues related to the partner agency and their clients. In contrast, high criticality would no doubt be warranted in a sociology department's social problems course. The student learning outcomes for such a course would likely require that the complexities of race, class, and gender be considered in depth as well as how these axes of domination play out in the political arena within the communities and agencies in which students are engaging in service learning.

A parallel question for the faculty member to consider pertains to community voice and community control of the service being provided. To what extent is the community partner supportive of, invested in, and/or requesting a critical approach in their work with students? To what extent is criticality appropriate or feasible in working with this particular community partner? Research has shown that community partners' work with service-learning students and faculty can divert their time and attention away from their jobs

(Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Within this context, high criticality's expectation of developing authentic relationships with community partners might require more time from the participating agency staff than they have available.

When a high level of criticality is appropriate from the perspective of both the course and the community, faculty must then be mindful of moving forward in a way that avoids the potential pitfall of "a single agreed upon social justice" (Butin, 2011, p. 32). We suggest that engaging students in the study of social conditions and the root causes of social problems must be grounded in reliable data about those conditions rather than lapsing into assumptions and opinions. Classroom discussions must invite and respect multiple points of view while also holding all participants (including the faculty member) to the expectation that their assertions be supported with reasonable evidence. These practices are central to developing the critical thinking skills that are associated with high quality service learning and with higher education's goals.

We encourage faculty to consider the level of criticality in each and every service-learning course that they teach and consider whether a higher level of criticality might enhance student learning while staying within the parameters of the course goals and community voice. For example, might student learning be enhanced in the accounting course referenced earlier by considering with students the funding challenges of the partnering organization and the societal values reflected in that situation? Even this one relatively small modification to the course could help students contextualize their auditing work and consider their roles as citizens within a broader social context. From a developmental perspective, it seems likely that faculty who engage in this kind of reflection about their service-learning courses will find opportunities to increase criticality in their teaching over time.

We offer one of the authors' courses as an example to illustrate this development. Jones has been teaching a course called *Violence in Families*, which reviews scholarly material related to various forms of abuse within families and intimate relationships, for the past 14 years. In the first iterations of the course, service learning took the form of charity with low criticality (e.g., the students held donation drives for the local battered women's shelter and offered their time at the shelter, painting the interior of the building, and interacting with the children in the shelter while their mothers were in group sessions). Although the course content offered a high level of criticality in terms of understanding the underlying issues involved in domestic violence, Jones soon realized that while the students' charitable service-learning work was providing for needs of the partner agency, it was offering little in terms of learning for her students. They

were not developing their knowledge through application of the course material to the relationships within the agency, nor were they seeing any hope of ending domestic violence through this experience.

In an effort to modify the service-learning experience to help reach the student learning goals for the course, Jones met with the director of the community partner agency and discussed at length the goals of the agency, as well as what she and her students could do to help achieve those goals. Both she and the director invested a great deal of time together building a relationship, which resulted in a collaborative effort to restructure the service-learning component of the course. They agreed that, with the 33 students in Jones' course, the agency's community education efforts could grow significantly, and the organization could expand its reach from the elementary and middle schools that they already served into the area high schools as well. Together, they selected the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program, developed by Jackson Katz (1995) at Northwestern University in the mid-1990s, and they team-taught this program to the Jones' students, who then took the program out into the local high schools. The university students visited all of the ninth grade health courses across the county and offered the MVP program to the high school students. Through their roles as community educators, the students developed a far deeper understanding of domestic violence and abusive relationships than had been the case with the previous service model. They learned how to respond effectively to violence and acquired a much greater sense of empowerment as they took what they were learning in the classroom into the community and shared it with others.

Through this transformation of the service-learning experience, all three aspects of critical service learning were enhanced in the course. The social change focus of the course was strengthened. The relationships among all the participants (faculty, students, and community partners) became more authentic. Greater equality of power among these participants was also achieved, with an agency staff member genuinely engaged as a co-teacher in the classroom. Even so, it must be said that the significant changes in the course were possible only because the staff of the partnering organization were eager to invest their time into the effort, the students in this 300-level course were capable of assuming a high level of responsibility and professional presence in the community, the faculty member had developed confidence and expertise in teaching service-learning courses, and the faculty member and partnering organization had developed a significant level of trust over time. As this example illustrates, higher levels of criticality in service-learning courses may be more likely to evolve incrementally through sustained effort over time rather than exist

fully-formed from the outset. All factors involved in achieving higher criticality are not directly within the faculty member's control, and in many cases higher levels of criticality cannot be achieved except through the maturing of the partnering relationship and evolving expertise of the various participants.

Through our own teaching and that of our colleagues, we have seen the impact of well-developed community partnerships linked to service-learning experiences from all three of Morton's (1995) approaches (charity, project, and social change), and we know from these experiences the tremendous value of these learning opportunities to our students and to the community. As a result we are strong advocates of the continued use of academic service learning and believe whole-heartedly in the value-added to our students' education from this engaged learning. Rather than adopt the traditional vs. critical service-learning paradigm that has been proposed, we suggest that criticality be considered in the construction of all service-learning courses and that faculty consider thoughtfully the level of criticality that is appropriate within a given course and academic discipline. Further, we suggest that criticality might be increased through more fully integrating critical thinking into service-learning courses. Through implementing this approach the academy can successfully sustain high quality service learning in a wide range of disciplines and, most importantly, can develop students' intellectual skills, empowering them to cultivate their own well-informed views on social issues throughout their lives.

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