Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Interruption

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Abstract

As a teacher, educator, and strong advocate for service learning, I became very interested in both the opportunities and the limitations of current approaches to service learning. This article begins to sketch an as yet unrealized relational approach to service learning, drawing on ideas about encounters with Others in the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. The first part of the article offers a brief introduction to the field of service learning and explores problematic aspects related to traditional and critical approaches in service learning initiatives, where ideas of objective knowledge of self and Other, teleological notions of progress, and server–served relationships limit possibilities of engagement and transcendence. The second part of the article draws on post-structuralist ideas in education to propose a distinction between the desire 'to learn from the Other' and the risky and difficult disposition to be open 'to being taught by the Other' (Biesta, 2012). I propose a strategic step beyond the limitations of traditional and critical approaches to service learning, where difference is seen as a productive and indispensable force, and where education is about encountering the world/ the Other and being altered by it.

Keywords: service learning, Levinas, post-structuralism, volunteerism, global education

Introduction: The trouble with service learning

Service learning is emerging as a significant pedagogical practice, particularly within higher education contexts. Butin (2011) situates service learning within the community engagement movement, which he suggests includes practices such as civic engagement, public scholarship, experiential education, participatory action research, volunteering abroad schemes, and community-based research. A common feature of service learning is sending higher education (often privileged) students to work in (often less- or under-privileged) communities/groups locally

or abroad. During the last 25 years, service learning as a form of community and intercultural engagement has become increasingly popular across a range of educational contexts. Furco (2011: 20) writes that this popularity has been fuelled by the uncritical assumption that service learning is an 'effective strategy for enhancing young people's educational development'. In fact, most academic literature on service learning, as Furco notes, advocates for this social movement as a practice that is essentially unproblematic and good for the betterment of society.

Like many practices of engagement between unequal communities, patterns of hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, salvationism, uncomplicated solutions, and paternalism are common in this educational practice (Andreotti, 2012). In addition, service learning has recently been criticized for lacking in theoretical critique and academic rigour (Butin, 2011; Furco, 2011). Butin argues that the field lacks the rigorous critique and self-reflexivity necessary for its own growth as a field of reputable and necessarily contestable study. Writing of the 'shadow side of service learning' (ix), Furco cites studies that have shown that technicist (traditional) approaches to service learning do not account for the complexities of cultural and political contexts and consequently serve to 'reinforce stereotypes … and exacerbate power differentials between social and cultural groups' (ix). This 'shadow side' is also critiqued by Butin (2011) through an exploration of what he calls the myths of service learning, which frame student experiences as occurring in culturally neutral and universally simplistic contexts that ignore the contested, complex, and varied domains of actual encounters. Rather, service learning is often situated within dynamic contexts of clashing values, ethical dilemmas (involving epistemic violences), and unpredictable outcomes.

More recently, this cultural critique has been discussed in community engagement literature relating to development education and contexts of global learning, global education, and global citizenship education (Cook, 2011; Heron, 2007; Jefferess, 2008; Jorgenson, 2010; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). For example, Cook, Heron, and Jorgenson, through qualitative research, deconstruct the 'helping imperative' present in minority world volunteers working in majority world contexts. Additionally, Jefferess, Jorgenson, and Zemach-Bersin all offer a strong critique of the ways in which global citizenship education projects can be, at times, forms 'of neo-imperialism which castigate the [majority world] as a deficient Other and an object and recipient of global citizen's [sic] benevolence' (Jorgenson, 27). Jefferess writes of a neo-imperialism situating the global citizen as one 'naturally endowed with the ability and inclination to "help" the Other' (28). Drawing upon this critique, a number of critical scholars are seeking a redefinition of global citizenship beyond notions of neo-imperialism, paternalism, ethnocentrism, and uncomplicated

solutions (see, for example, Andreotti, 2012; Cook, 2011; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). In light of this critique, service learning approaches require further exploration.

Because service learning occurs in experiential, embodied, real-world contexts, Butin (2011) urges that practitioners have the opportunity to critically explore the inherent cultural and political complexities in more rigorous and self-reflexive ways. Jorgenson (2010) notes that relationships are a vital component in fostering global citizenship and also observes the complexities of power imbalances present and embedded within relationships with the Other. Given that service learning cannot be transparent, linear, singular, or neutral as a community experience, Butin (2011) suggests that it needs to be framed as an intellectual movement and as a question within the academic experience of students, rather than as an unproblematic social movement, activist initiative, or intercultural methodology. In this context, if service learning is framed as an academic question, critique becomes necessary and central. This article is positioned thus as one possibility that must also be open to critique. I suggest an alternative approach to service learning that responds to perceived current limitations. In doing so, however, I am aware that this too as a possibility presents new questions and potential problems. The purpose of this article is to explore relational possibilities for service learning based on a post-critical conceptual framework as a response to previous critiques of traditional (technicist) and critical service learning perspectives (see Bruce and Brown, 2010). As a teacher, educator, and strong supporter of service learning, it is not my intention here to reject the opportunities that traditional and critical approaches present. In fact, I continue to use a range of approaches depending on the context, and practise these while reflexively aware of both the opportunities and limitations inherent within my work. What I propose here is another possibility: emergent and as yet unrealized, but with offerings that may address some of the current challenges to existing approaches.

Traditional service learning projects are by far the most commonly implemented conception of service learning. A traditional service learning approach is based on the premise that there are privileged and underprivileged people, and that the privileged – those who have – ought to give to the underprivileged – those in need. This service learning approach positions students as knowers, helpers, and experts who participate in (mostly) charitable projects aimed at helping others less fortunate than themselves. Local examples may include helping out in an old people's home, fundraising for a charity, or running a sports programme for underprivileged young people. Examples of international projects may be a study abroad or volunteer project 'helping' a majority world community through building projects, education initiatives, or fundraising. Critical educators have problematized this approach by arguing that traditional service learning projects do not challenge structural causes of

poverty or injustices, and are therefore complicit in reproducing existing inequalities (Bruce and Brown, 2010; Mitchell, 2007; Wade, 2000).

Critical service learning projects seek to address the limitations of the traditional service learning approach through an application of critical pedagogical practices. The critical service learning approach is based on the belief that there are inequities in society that need to be redressed towards a shared ideal of justice. Consistent with critical pedagogical approaches, the aim of critical service learning projects is to develop critical thinkers and actors who can advance issues of justice. Examples of international projects may include a study abroad project that embeds critical thinking and action within the service experience as a way of seeking to address structural inequalities. Local projects could include an awareness-raising campaign addressing global issues such as sweatshops or human trafficking. However, the same critique levelled against traditional service learning approaches may also be applied to critical service learning.

Critical service learning may also be criticized for complicity in reproducing inequalities (Bruce and Brown, 2010). Furthermore, there are other problematic similarities with both traditional and critical service learning projects. Both approaches are based on the limitation and problematic of a server–served dichotomy. That is, the student is positioned as the server, and the community partner/person is positioned as the served. Such a hierarchical relationship places the student in the position of a knower, expert, and helper: one who has something to give. Conversely, the served is positioned as one who does not know and does not have – one who is without. Linked to this idea, both traditional and critical service learning projects have a tendency to focus on the idea of learning *about* the Other[1] in order that one may *help* or *change* the Other. Conversely, I will propose here instead a repositioning of service learning towards a Levinasian possibility of being in a position to be *taught* by the Other (Biesta, 2012; Levinas, 1991; Todd, 2004). While on the surface it may seem strange to challenge the idea of 'helping', as suggested earlier, many acts of helping within service learning projects (even critical service learning ones) may in fact be acts of complicity in the reproduction of structural and cultural inequalities. Additionally, although there is often a declared intention to 'learn from' the Other (local knowledge or culture), the 'helping/serving' imperative positions Others only as local knowers while students are positioned as knowers of knowledge that is universal and essential for their development towards an allegedly shared ideal of progress (Andreotti, 2011). The criticism of this position is outlined further in the next section.

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1 Defined here in the Levinasian tradition as one who is radically different to oneself.

Conceptualizing 'Otherwise'

Traditional and critical service learning approaches framed within a modernist framework position students as rational, autonomous, centred subjects, carriers and dispensers of rights who through schooling develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to contribute responsibly to a democratically just society. Peters and Burbules (2004) write that modern education projects are concerned with the development of moral perfectibility, social progress, and personal autonomy. Thus, projects tend to be centred on bettering oneself along the teleological trajectory of human progress, and of betterment of the autonomous, centred subject (Heron, 2007). A student in this context is seen as one who is (or is learning to become) stable, coherent, knowable, and rational. These aforementioned constructs are problematicized in the *discursive turn:* defined here as a conceptualization of language where language constructs rather than describes reality (Andreotti, 2010a). Peters and Burbules (2004: 19) write that post-structural (discursive) thinkers challenge the idea of 'an autonomous, free and transparently self-conscious subject that is the fountain of all knowledge and moral and political agency'. Traditional and critical humanistic perspectives, Peters and Burbules note, 'emphasize a scientific mode of knowledge produced by an objective, rational self that can provide universal truths about the world' (21). This mode of knowledge production is also at work in encounters with difference, and evident in the desire to have stable knowledge about the Other. In this sense, if the self is self-evident (can be known), the Other can also be objectively 'understood'. Within this project, knowing (about) the Other becomes a project of self-betterment, prompting two common practices of representation: one where the self sees the Other as not able to represent herself (this may mean that the self knows better about the Other than the Other does herself), and a practice where the self expects the Other to self-represent as a self-evident subject. Both practices are grounded on the notion of self and Other as knowable, and of language as capable of describing reality objectively. Todd (2004: 15) illustrates the problem with this: 'When I think I know, when I think I understand the Other, I am exercising my knowledge over the Other, shrouding the Other in my totality'.

Furthermore, traditional and critical service learning projects may focus on using the Other to fulfil the server's own needs of self-betterment, or self-cultivation[2] (Kirby, 2009). Heron (2007), in her critique of development workers, found that participants often positioned the Other as passive, available, and non-individuated; essentially there to serve the self-betterment needs of the workers. Drawing upon the work of

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2 Avoiding self-betterment does not necessarily preclude the betterment of self. The term self-betterment in this context is used to refer to the ego-centric self, improved through rationality; whereas the betterment of self could occur through ethical relationality with Other, in a non-violent, non-rational encounter with Other enabling an altering of self. This idea is explained further later in the article.

Frankenberg (1993), Heron further explains that a modernist notion of a centred self is one where encounters with the Other may add to our own self-betterment, which she writes justifies the claim that 'we are all the same underneath' (70). In such an encounter we add to ourselves and take in differences (encountered through engagement with the Other) that do not disrupt our stable sense of unified self, becoming blind/deaf to whatever challenges this understanding. When adopting a traditional and/or critical service learning approach of engagement with alterity in the Other, we hold on to a centred, stable idea of self, and then we seek to help the Other to become more like us (Heron, 2007). Herein lies the limits of rationality, because there is danger of inflicting violence upon the Other as we seek to construct *norms of sameness*.

Discursive pedagogical practices are concerned with considering ways of constructing difference beyond *norms of sameness* (Popkewitz and Fendler, 1999). Beyond the normative, Levinas's work centres on the possibilities for reframing constructions of difference as productive and indispensable, as Lorde (1979: para 6–7) explains:

> Difference must be [seen] as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark . . . . Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. Within the interdependence of mutual differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.

In education, several scholars have expressed interest in reframing social justice and development education beyond ideas of humanistic pursuits of universality and sameness, or critical pedagogical perspectives of oppression focusing on a teleological ideal of progress (see, for example, Andreotti, 2011; Peters and Burbules, 2004; Todd, 2004). In considering such discursive possibilities for service learning, a deconstruction of rational, normative communities is useful, and here I turn to the work of Biesta (2006), who provides an insightful critique.

The trouble with rational communities

I argue that service learning projects for the development of rational autonomy are problematic. Biesta (2006) explains how rational, modern communities and institutions (including education and schooling) either 'devour' or 'spit out' strangers (Bauman, 1995; Lingis, 1994). Strangers in this context are defined by

Bauman (1995: 1) as those 'who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world'. In a compelling use of metaphor by Claude Levi-Strauss, Bauman (1995: 2) writes that modern rational communities either assimilate strangers through anthropophagic behaviour, 'metabolically transforming them into a tissue indistinguishable from one's own', or exclude the stranger through anthropoemic behaviour 'vomiting strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those outside'. Thus, from the modern perspective, a rational being is one who fits within a preset notion of the rational community. The role of educators is to shape students into what/whom is already known. In traditional and critical service learning projects, the emphasis is often on considering ways to help the stranger (or read the Other, in this context) to become more normative and rational. Questions asked in this context may be, for example: How might we help the Other to adapt or fit into this community? How might we alter the structures of this community to allow the Other to exist? What might we do to allow the Other to exist on the fringes of this community? How might we exclude the Other to protect the normative practices of our community? These questions exist in the shadow of fearing non-normative, irrational behaviour. As Biesta (2006: 7) explains: 'Humanism posits a *norm of humaneness,* a norm of what it means to be human, and in so doing excludes those who do not live up to this norm'. Thus, humanism is 'unable to be open to the possibility that newcomers [or strangers/the Other] might be able to radically alter our understanding of what it means to be human'.

Many educators engaged with these critiques call for the need to radically alter our understanding of what it means to be human (Andreotti, 2010b; Biesta, 2006; Todd, 2004). In fact Burbules and Berk (1999) consider that ontological and epistemological perspectives beyond the rational are a necessity. To think otherwise, to disrupt universality, to create and to be comfortable with aporia, and to think without certainty, all usher in possibilities for radical new thinking. Learning to be otherwise, it is argued here, may be possible through encountering Other-wise. This is what Lingis (1994) referred to when he wrote of being in *community with those whom we have nothing in common*. Such face-to-face encounters with alterity, according to Levinas, have the potential to radically alter our way of being in the world. And herein lies the very essence of Biesta's (2006) thesis regarding subjectivity: that learning ought not to be about the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes at all, but rather a project of *coming into the world*, where the *world* is (engaging with) the Other. Biesta argues that education is an ethical project, where subjectivity is shaped, interrupted, and altered in the political sphere of relations with plurality and difference. He calls this view a *pedagogy of interruption* (Biesta, 2006; Biesta 2010). My intention is to explore what the beginning of a pedagogy of interruption may look like in practice in the context of service learning.

Being taught by the Other: Relational possibilities for service learning

I have argued earlier that in traditional and critical service learning initiatives there are primarily two problems with the idea of serving the Other: the ethnocentric effort to make the Other the same as me, and the paternalistic imbalance in the server–served dichotomy. Trying to address both tendencies opens up new questions and creates new problems. One possible way to approach service learning in ways that avoid these tendencies is to place Others as 'teachers', and students as 'learners' who 'learn from' the Other. The imbalance of power is addressed by 'allowing' the Other to 'teach' on her own terms, but there is an expectation that this knowledge (i.e., the content of learning) will be accessible, available, intelligible, and easily grasped (Jones, 1999). When Others do not meet this expectation, imbalances of power resurface with renewed force (as they were only superficially addressed). Jones explores this tension through a critique of her experience in teaching a mixed-race class by grouping students according to race. She chose to do this in response to earlier critique that indigenous Maori and Pacific Island students felt uncomfortable and unsafe when sharing personal accounts of cultural difference with New Zealand European (Pakeha or white) students. She observed that through 'confessing their ignorance' and a 'desire to know', Pakeha students positioned themselves as 'good' students and yet, Jones writes:

> … their cannibal desire to know the other through being taught or fed by her is simultaneously a *refusal* to know. It is not only a refusal to recognize one's own implication in the racialized social order … it is also a resistance to the possibility that the other cannot or might not want to be 'known' or consumed by them, or to teach them (313).

A brief field anecdote from my own experience can illustrate this dilemma further:

> Maori scholars have critiqued physical education (PE) for its lack of appreciation of the contribution of Maori knowledge, especially in terms of meta-physical dimensions of the body and of movement itself. As a PE teacher educator committed to addressing social injustices, I took this criticism very seriously and was determined to learn from Maori scholars and elders about these aspects in order to be able to engage my students in this learning as well. Therefore I participated in professional development opportunities with Maori elders and educators in order to raise the profile of Maori knowledge and address the criticisms by filling the knowledge gap identified by the Maori critics. During one of these workshops, an elder focused on cultural aspects of Maori forms of physical and mental exercise, which was fine, but left me frustrated as I was eager to learn in depth about cosmological and meta-physical aspects related to body and movement and these were not touched upon. Towards the end of the

workshop, I decided to ask the elder for that knowledge. His reply was that 'it was not the time or place to learn that kind of knowledge'. My first response (that I kept to myself) was frustration and confusion: I had taken part in the workshop because I wanted to address the criticism of a lack of knowledge in my field and yet, I was denied access to that knowledge. My second response was different (it is explored below).

'Relation with the Other is an ethical relation', Levinas writes (1991: 51), yet I would say in as much as it is a welcome by the Other. We cannot force a welcome, neither do we have a right to know an Other, or be known by them. Levinas offers further useful insights into the nuances of the teaching and learning relationship between the self and the Other:

> To approach the Other in conversation … is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other … is an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics [i.e., making explicit knowledge that is already inside the learner]; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain (51).

This Levinasian idea of being taught by the Other means that we are in some way altered by such an encounter, as the Other 'brings me more than I contain'. Biesta highlights a useful distinction between the idea of learning *from* the Other, and that of being *taught by* the Other (Biesta, 2012). For Biesta, learning *from* the Other may occur without alteration to our unified idea of self. Learning from the Other *without* alteration is essentially a project of self-betterment (Heron, 2007; Kirby, 2009). When we say 'this person has really taught me something', Biesta explains that what we imply is that we have been altered unexpectedly by this transcendent encounter, and it is a revelation. The idea of transcendence is highlighted in Levinas's quote above when he refers to being taught not in a maieutical sense,[3] but rather in a radical encounter towards ethical responsibility. In traditional and critical service learning contexts it is possible, through maieutics, to encounter the Other without alteration. Examining my first response to the incident with the elder pointed me in a different direction:

> My second response to the elder was a realization that I had come to the encounter expecting the elder to teach me on my own terms something I expected to learn for my self-betterment. On his terms the elder was teaching me that the pathway

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3 Biesta (2012) provides a useful distinction between maieutics (bringing out what is already there) as a constructivist approach to learning, and transcendence, defined as learning that can only come from outside our knowing selves. In this context I use transcendence to explore the idea of being taught by the Other in a way that disrupts the knowing, stable self towards ethicality of relationship with alterity.

I had chosen to acquire cosmological/ metaphysical knowledge was not the right one. He was teaching me through his refusal to teach what I wanted to learn: he provoked an emotional response that showed me the motivations behind my benevolent actions and how, in trying to deconstruct or reverse the server–served dichotomy, there was still a sub-conscious desire to get something pre-defined and specific out of this encounter for myself, which, paradoxically, reinforced my position of dominance in the relationship. This sub-conscious desire to learn a specific lesson triggered the anger and frustration I experienced when my undeclared expectations were not met.

Thus, entering into an ethical, altering encounter with the Other is a transcendent project where one is taught by the Other something one cannot expect (Biesta, 2012). Kirby (2009: 165) notes that entering into such an encounter requires both the suspension of our egos, and the bracketing of judgements and preconceptions of the Other whom we shall encounter. Suspension refers to the risk of deferment of the 'desire to better one's self' as a modernist, humanistic ideal. Similar to Heron's critique (2007) discussed earlier in this article, the idea of self-betterment as the improvement of rationality cannot be the intention of an ethical project conceived in the terms described here. Kirby proposes the useful idea of bracketing our prejudices, rational thought, prior knowledge, perceptions, stereotypes, and generalizations in order to avoid categorization, reducibility, and claims of knowing; as the goal is to be in a state of openness to be taught by the Other. A state of openness, thus, is not an entire rejection of our ego, but rather the idea of conscious suspension or interruption: *catching the thoughts* and *capturing the emotion* (i.e., bracketing) so that we may become attentive to what the Other may teach us. While no easy task, pedagogical methods that may be useful include intentional attentiveness (as a form of 'hyper-self-reflexivity'), group reflections of encounters, and journalling as a reflexive tool (Kirby, 2009; Andreotti, Fa'afoi, Sitomaniemi-San and Ahenkakew, 2013).

Certainly, by its very nature, an altering encounter is not without risks. Levinas (1981: 120) writes:

Regarding communication and transcendence one can only speak of their uncertainty. Communication is an adventure of subjectivity, different from that which is dominated by a concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding in consciousness; it will involve uncertainty. Communication with the other can only be transcendent as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run.

These words capture the essence of a number of arguments that have been previously made in this article. Firstly, a transcendent approach (rather than one based on maieutics) offers the possibility for alteration of subjectivity beyond self-betterment. Secondly, an ethical relation of this kind requires sacrifice (in the suspension of ego

and bracketing of self). Thirdly, a transcendent encounter is based upon uncertainty, and we are unable to encounter what we will learn as we encounter difference. Neither can we control such an encounter for our own egoistic desire if it is to be an ethical encounter of responsibility towards the Other. In the above quote, Levinas makes a further (fourth) point, and that is highlighting the *risk* of ethical relations. Consideration of risk is critical to the essence of a Levinasian possibility for such an approach to service learning. Todd (2004: 10) captures the nature of this dangerous encounter when she writes: 'Precisely because the Other is seen to be that which disrupts its coherency, the subject tumbles into uncertainty, its past strategies for living challenged by the very strangeness of difference itself'. Not surprisingly, a student within a Levinasian service learning context may resist such an invitation to be altered (Kirby, 2009) and therefore, 'receive nothing of the Other, but what is in [her]' (Levinas, 1991: 43). While as educators we may create the opportunity for radical encounters, we can certainly not force our own desires upon students, as this would be to enact ethical violence upon them (Andreotti, 2012).

When considering resistance and its counterpart – engaging in the welcome,[4] Levinas (1991) writes of the necessity of Metaphysical Desire. This is not desire that fulfills our needs, but rather desire that brings inspiration, alteration, and interruption of one's self through encountering alterity in the Other. Kirby (2009: 164) captures the essence of this desire when she states: 'I cannot help but be intrigued, not in the sense of wanting to *grasp* the unknown and lock it down to knowledge, but in the sense of yearning for the teaching that only the Other can provide'. This desire as a state of openness creates the space for us to be taught by the Other 'beyond the capacity of the I' (Levinas, 1991: 51). For students in service learning contexts who grasp the possibilities inherent within Metaphysical Desire, an ethical relationship with the Other becomes sacrificial as a gesture of generosity that is not self-interested, but is for the Other (Todd, 2004).

For Biesta (2006), this curiosity and yearning are part of a *pedagogy of interruption* that opens up possibilities for *coming into the world*. Because of the experiential nature of service learning and the oft present component of face-to-face encounters, *coming into the world* may be a welcome possibility for those who desire 'the dangerous life [where a] fine risk is to be run' (Levinas, 1981: 120). These ideas are expressed clearly in Biesta's (2004: 317) words:

> When I speak with the rational voice of the community, it is not really me who is speaking; it is the rational voice of my community. But when I speak to the stranger, when I expose myself to the stranger, then I find my own voice, then it

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4 The welcome is defined here as openness to the face-to-face encounter with alterity in the Other.

is me who has to speak – and no one else can do it for me. *[This is my coming into the world]*

The sketch of a Levinasian framework for service learning presented here seeks to work towards discursive practices through engagement with alterity beyond the normative. However, it needs to be emphasized that the service learning approach suggested in this article is not a postmodern attempt at self-betterment and self-cultivation, nor is it an absolute relativist account of difference. As Kirby (2009: 169) points out, within a Levinasian framework, 'justice arises out of, and in service to the ethical relation'.

Unlike traditional and critical service learning approaches, however, a relational service learning approach cannot be scripted. That is to say that the idea of justice cannot be foretold prior to an encounter with the Other (Biesta, 2003; Kirby, 2009; Todd, 2009). Therefore, the way in which justice may be conceived of in one context is likely to be quite different to justice conceived within a different context. Kirby uses Levinas's (1981) distinction between the Saying and the Said to help with this understanding. Where the Saying may be defined as an altering encounter with the Other, the Said is any thinking and action that is resultant from the Saying. The Said is concerned with thoughts and actions that cannot be prejudged or pre-known prior to the Saying (encounter). In a relational service learning context, the Said represents a momentary settling of thoughts, ideas, and desires that arise out of the Saying. The term momentary is emphasized, for there is never truly a settling (Kirby, 2009). There is always the need to return to the Saying for further teaching that in turn informs new possibilities of the Said. Here Biesta (2003: 67) takes us back to the 'sphere of risk' as he writes of:

> … questioning that doesn't presuppose its own answers. This, I think, suggests a pedagogy that is no longer primarily informed by knowledge, but by something that we may want to refer to as 'justice'. There is definitely a risk to be run here, both for learners and for those who dare to teach.

Referring, as Biesta points out, to justice in this context requires emphasis. The Saying and the Said, it is hoped, will lead to just thoughts and just actions that honour both the alterity of the Other, and the altered state of the service learning student.

Conclusion

In this concluding section, I will seek to connect the varied ideas expressed in this article into a suggestion towards a relational possibility for service learning that may be useful within development education and related educational projects. The need to reconsider social justice orientations within discursive frameworks has led to the proposal of this relational approach to service learning. Leaning primarily on Biesta's

(2006) idea of a *pedagogy of interruption* and Todd's (2004) work on *Learning from the Other,* this post-critical approach to service learning is concerned with challenging traditional and critical notions of the server–served dichotomy. In particular, the idea of learning about the Other in order to help the Other is discursively reframed to consider instead how we may be taught by the Other, not towards a project of self-betterment, but rather towards a project of relationality and responsibility. Following Kirby (2009), I employed the term *suspension* to highlight this idea of deferment of self-betterment and rational advancement. Additionally, I also used the term *bracketing* to emphasize the necessity of catching rational thoughts and capturing emotions during a radical encounter with alterity, in order that we do not project our own subjectivity onto the Other (Kirby, 2009).

Furthermore, a relational possibility for service learning follows the Levinasian idea of a dangerous pedagogy that involves risks to a stable sense of self, and uncertainty within an encounter with alterity. I have argued in this article that in order to enable a sacrificial, altering encounter with the Other, Metaphysical Desire is required. Kirby notes that Metaphysical Desire is that which draws us to the Mystery of the Other, not in order to know the Other, but to risk ethical alteration through such an encounter. Understanding this idea of Desire opens us up to the possibility of being taught by the Other. Finally, I have sought to suggest here a resignifying possibility for development education and related educational projects, including global citizenship education, towards alterity not as seeking sameness, but as seeking difference as a productive and indispensable force and preparedness to being altered by difference. I intend to develop these ideas further, particularly with reference to the mobilization of Metaphysical Desire and the place and role of learning about injustices and traumas in education.

Therefore, it is possible I have argued here that relational service learning projects based on post-critical conceptual frameworks may provide opportunities for the reframing of international (and local) encounters with Others beyond the imperialist projects of benevolence, paternalism, and the 'helping imperative'. I have sought here to consider ways in which service learning students may be taught by the Other, in an ethical encounter of responsibility towards the Other, but only where the Other extends a welcome.

Acknowledgement

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