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"Community" is a concept central to service learning. For the most part, however, service-learning programs tend to embody several assumptions about community that deserve to be more carefully examined. One assumption is that community means groups off campus. Another is that community consists primarily or even exclusively of those who have been identified as needing assistance. Such assumptions may be counterproductive. By consciously adopting a more flexible and inclusive understanding of community, programs can not only help participants better appreciate how community can be renewed and sustained but also help them develop more effective habits of civic participation.

Community On and Off Campus

Critical Incidents

Several years after I began serving as the director of the service-learning program at Bentley College, I was fortunate to get a graduate intern with considerable multicultural work experience. As we sat down to identify projects to which he could most profitably devote his attention, it occurred to me that he might be just the person to seek an answer to a question that had been troubling me for some time: why had so few students of color shown interest in our program? After all, it was always intended to be truly inclusive, and a serious effort had been made to involve all campus constituencies in its development. Now, however, we were beginning our third year and, as far as I could see, our student makeup was no more diverse now than when we started.

Many weeks later, after dozens of phone calls and interviews, my intern reported back to me. His words were sobering and raised at least as many questions as they answered. Minimal minority participation was due to many factors—some more, some less amenable to change—but one key factor was the perception that, to many minority students, our efforts seemed decidedly misguided. Granted, the world off campus offered countless opportunities to work for the com-

mon good—but, then, so did the campus itself. In fact, if we wanted to help students learn better to appreciate the importance of community, why did we skip over the single most obvious, easily accessible community students had to deal with, namely, their own? Did we somehow think one had to travel "downtown" to experience the results of years of racism and limited opportunity? Were obstacles to civic commitment, equal participation, and the common good somehow more real out there than they were in here?

I'm embarrassed to admit that, to me, they may indeed have seemed more real out there, and I would venture to guess that for many of my campus-based service-learning associates—faculty, staff, and students—they may still seem so. And insofar as this is the case, we may have missed something critical closer to home, despite our determination to take to heart the "Principles of Good Practice" (Honnet and Porter, 1989) and all that Jane Kendall and associates (Kendall, 1990) have helped us learn from the mistakes of the past, despite our sincere recognition of the importance of reciprocity and mutual respect, despite our best efforts to correct programmatically any suggestion of a missionary mindset among student participants. That something is a widespread failure to build into our programs sufficient attention to the problems of community on our own campuses. I make this statement on the basis of program descriptions, personal experience at conferences and workshops, and the focus of most service-learning literature concerned with questions of community.

It has been my good fortune, over the past few years, to visit service-learning programs on a dozen or so campuses around the country. Partially as a result of the Bentley lesson I have just described, I almost always try to find a way to talk to students of color about their views on their school's efforts to connect more effectively with the community. Rarely have I found any significant number of such students who disapproved of this work—however critical they might be about particulars. However, just as rarely have I found them at all pleased with the health of the "communities" on their own campuses. Indeed, I have so frequently come away with stories of campus incidents so blatantly racist that I had to remind myself I was at an institution of higher education. What made these incidents even more disheartening was their easy coexistence with a campus commitment to service.

By this I do not mean to imply that those most directly responsible for that commitment—faculty, staff, and students—in any way condoned or excused such behavior. As Richard Battistani mentions in this issue of *Metropolitan*

Universities (see also Battistoni, 1995), and as others have also pointed out, service learning and respect for diversity naturally go hand in hand. On many campuses, the service-learning program is a locus of genuine tolerance and respect. Nor am I suggesting that the failure of programs to help students deal adequately with the multicultural dimension of their work must be regarded as an important factor contributing to campus racism. Although inadequate preparation for and/or reflection on the multicultural dimension of service experiences may, in fact, be widespread, I am not aware of any data that suggest such inadequacy is itself a serious cause of prejudice. Rather, it is my perception that, at least on many predominantly white campuses, minority students simply do not see the service-learning commitment to community as something that in any significant way directly affects their own well-being.

A visit I paid to a school in the midwest may illustrate this point. The institution in question had developed a service-learning program with an enviable reputation. A high percentage of its students participated in community work; its projects were well designed; its director, dedicated and resourceful. The more I chatted with program faculty and students, the more impressed I was by the school's social commitment. Then, at the invitation of one faculty member, I wandered over to the African-American house.

Here I was also hospitably received, and after we had gotten to know one another a bit, I allowed myself to express some of the admiration I felt for all the service-learning center was doing to help students grapple with real problems in society. My new hosts politely nodded, but when I suggested that all this work could not help but have a positive effect on the general campus atmosphere, even the polite nods disappeared. As I quickly found out, African-Americans were sporadically but regularly harassed on campus in a variety of ways. One recent, especially ugly, incident was, in fact, still very much in the front of everyone's mind.

Naturally I was both shocked and disappointed. I noted that I had just met dozens of people who, I felt quite sure, simply wouldn't tolerate such behavior on their campus. I asked if the incident were widely known. It was. I asked if anyone outside their own circle had publicly spoken out against it. No one had. What about the service-learning center? No, it had not taken a stand. When I later returned to the service-learning offices, I tactfully alluded to my experience. Yes, what I had been told was true: campus racism was a limited but recurrent problem. No, the service program had never

gotten directly involved. Its energies lay elsewhere.

I ask myself now how often minority students on my campus wondered why our service-learning program's commitment to community never seemed to consolidate around on-campus issues and incidents. How did the articles on civic and moral awakenings that regularly appeared in our student newspaper resonate in their minds? Why was it that we seemed so concerned to get students involved at X, when there was so much that needed to be done in our own front yard? For me, this collection of experiences raises a series of questions to which I have few satisfactory answers.

Questions

Perhaps the first and most fundamental question concerns our usual assumption that community means people "out there." I do not want to wander here into a conceptual or definitional maze. However, it has often struck me just how easily most of us in the service-learning movement take this word for granted. When I explain what I do to people who have never heard of service learning—academic or otherwise—it is not unusual for them to assume a very different referent for community than the one I have in mind. In fact, it is not unusual for them to assume something as naturally inclusive as McKnight's (1995) suggestion that, "By community, we mean the social place used by family, friends, neighbors, neighborhood associations, clubs, civic groups, local enterprises, churches, ethnic associations, temples, local unions, local government and local media" (p. 257).

McKnight's constellation of interdependent, functionally defined constituents is a far cry from the discrete, and by definition, socially dysfunctional populations that most service-learning faculty and students see at the center of their work. Furthermore, it is not just the interconnections that faculty and students fail to experience; it is also the absence of many groups McKnight's formulation takes for granted, e.g., unions, business establishments, and veterans organizations. I can understand the genuine puzzlement on my barber's or brother-in-law's face as he tries to make sense of the fact that the examples of community I cite seem to include neither his ethnic group (Italian-American, Irish-American) nor his work (running a small business). When he asks, I remember to assure him that there is a place for both.

Theoretically, most service-learning proponents would agree that community means more than a specific group in need of some kind of assistance. However, it is not at all uncommon for service-learning proponents to show

genuine reluctance to include in their working definition of community any significant representative of the private sector. They find it easy to slip into a principled exclusivity. At one college I visited, the service-learning program had been so intent on helping underserved communities of color just outside of town that it had undertaken nothing with the local school system. This was the domain of townies, and townies, it seemed, were part of the problem. The resulting resentment could hardly be said to have enhanced the likelihood of developing any long-term solutions.

Much has been written in recent years about the widespread erosion of community in the United States. One of the most widely read studies of this phenomenon is Bellah and associates' *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985). As part of their analysis, the authors draw an interesting distinction between "communities" in the traditional sense and what they call "lifestyle enclaves":

> Such enclaves are segmental in two senses. They involve only a segment of each individual, for they concern only private life, especially leisure and consumption. And they are segmental socially in that they include only those with a common lifestyle. The different, those with other lifestyles, are not necessarily despised. They may be willingly tolerated. But they are irrelevant or even invisible in terms of one's own lifestyle enclave (p.72).

I would like to suggest that this distinction has a usefulness quite apart from any the authors intended. By allowing our working definition of community to narrow not just to "those out there," but also to a decidedly circumscribed sense of those out there, we run the risk of contributing to, at least on our students' part, an artificial understanding of community and how it operates—even as we call for a commitment to community renewal. We may, in fact, be inadvertently reinforcing a version of Bellah's "lifestyle enclave." This can happen in several ways.

As noted above, the contemporary service-learning movement has made a deliberate effort to promote greater equality and more mutual respect than was true in the past between on-campus and off-campus groups. To my knowledge, few programs have made this effort more conscientiously or successfully than the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WPIC) at the University of Pennsylvania. Speaking to the future both of Penn and of West Philadelphia, George Brown, former executive director of WPIC and a community worker for over 35 years, and Ira Harkavy, director of Penn's Center

for Community Partnerships, remark:

> We are well aware that our two cases only touch on the concept of trust and its central role in effective university-community partnerships. We are also aware that WPIC's work is only one aspect of a very complex relationship between Penn and its community. Notwithstanding, we are convinced, that community-university partnerships are essential if both the community and university are to prosper. We need each other as we have never needed each other before (Brown and Harkavy, 1995, pp. 66-67).

On a broad, institutional level, Penn and West Philly seem to be moving towards the kind of interdependence that McKnight (1994) and others see as a hallmark of genuine community. But Penn's ability to acknowledge and honor such an interdependence is not the same as its students' ability to do so. While Penn as a school is necessarily linked by geography to the fate of West Philadelphia, its students are free to come and go. Indeed, even an intense personal desire to work in the city's neighborhoods cannot change the fact that, the more most Penn students understand, the more they understand just how little they are a part of those neighborhoods. As Michael Zuckerman (1994), a history department colleague of Harkavy's, reports of one of his students: "He'd arrived at Turner [a public school in West Philadelphia] the first day, afraid of being part of the "them" for once. He'd left, six weeks later, 'dishearteningly' certain that he was not and could not possibly be part of 'them'..." (p. 57). Unlike the inner-city youngsters he worked with, this student—and most other Penn students—would someday "go forth into a society in which places are increasingly allocated according to credentials, and they [would] go forth with the very best of credentials" (p. 60).

In other words, in situations in which members of the on- and off-campus communities are not, for the most part, identical, the most that many students can hope for in and through their service work is merely an empathetic reaching out to a world of which they can never be a part. Even if, as is especially often the case of community colleges and urban commuter campuses, the on- and off-campus communities overlap, it is not unusual for the focus of outreach efforts to be on subgroups different from that of the participating students. This, of course, is not meant in any way to dismiss or even qualify the importance of such outreach. As Zuckerman and other service-learning educators have concluded, such outreach may well be the best chance these students will ever have to form a personal bridge to "realities

beyond those of their own past and prospective affluence" (p. 60). But the temporary convergence of interests, if not of lifestyles, that brings together a college student and the members of a disadvantaged off-campus population can hardly be romanticized into something it is not. Students do not join the community of the homeless, the handicapped, the poor simply because they develop bonds of deep respect with individual members of those groups—or even of love. Ostrow (1995) has published a relevant study of students' experience of social and psychological difference in their work with the homeless. If our students are to experience more than the kind of limited affiliation Bellah juxtaposes to genuine community, if we hope to help them to better understand the importance of belonging to and sustaining community, we shall have to do more than send them off campus.

Several months ago, I was invited to visit a public university on the verge of launching an ambitious service-learning program. Given the large size of the school—and the small size of the community—one particularly pressing issue was the danger of saturation, i.e., too many students trying to do too much good in too few places. As we attempted to get a handle on this problem, the question of on-campus service arose. Since the university was by far the largest community in the area, didn't it make sense to include service work on campus in the range of service options?

For some time, I balked at this idea: wasn't one of the purposes of service-learning to help students get exposure to social groups with which they might otherwise remain unfamiliar; wasn't some kind of social stretching part of its very fabric? Could students tutoring fellow classmates at a math or writing center on campus experience the kinds of cognitive/developmental breakthroughs Zuckerman and others have described? Such a form of service seemed too socially incestuous, too psychologically familiar to serve as an effective vehicle for values challenges and values clarification.

But I am no longer so sure. In the first place, I think I may at times have drawn too sharp a line between the needs of the community out there and the needs of the community right here. In this particular case, there were, in fact, few significant racial or socioeconomic distinctions between the two populations: whatever groups were represented in the one could also be found in the other. Nor could I deny that the campus was rife with a wide variety of social problems that I would have immediately seized upon as important service opportunities had they appeared outside this campus's truly invisible boundaries. Tutoring students from disadvantaged and/or immigrant back-

grounds, educating against ethnic stereotyping, educating about AIDS, working against gender violence, promoting environmentally sound attitudes and behavior—all these represented legitimate unmet needs, regardless of whether they surfaced on or off campus.

Furthermore, I have since come to see the campus setting as providing some special advantages of its own.   For the campus is, in a fundamental, unforced sense, one of a student's primary communities.   Here there exists, not only an interdependence of diversified interests, but also a complex body of resources and opportunities, and together they constitute a natural arena for the development of democratic skills, civic awareness, and a personal commitment to the common good.   To be sure, on-campus service could collapse into the kinds of traditional student activities that do not challenge social assumptions, psychological comfort zones, or individual priorities.   But, as I well knew, off-campus service also had its list of challenges and dangers.

Thus, the question presents itself: to what degree do we in the service-learning movement need to reassess our assumptions about service?   When I survey a resource book such as Campus Compact's *Service Matters* (Cha and Rothman, 1994), I find little that reflects the potential of service opportunities on campus.   To be sure, I can probably assume that on many—if not most—campuses, students involved in off-campus service also demonstrate on-campus leadership on a range of social issues.   However, it may be that such an ad hoc arrangement is simply not enough.

I come back to the story with which I began: the fact that minority students on my campus should feel alienated from a program that seeks to foster an inclusive sense of community represents a serious critique of that program.   That they should look askance at efforts to enlist students in community problem-solving off campus—while analogous problems fester on campus—makes perfect sense.   If a developing sense of civic responsibility and social justice demand that one not flinch from looking at and becoming involved in the bigger picture, it also demands that one not be blind to manifestations of uncivil attitudes and antisocial behavior in the immediate foreground.   If there is something of unique value in situations that force one to confront the social and psychological other, that challenge one to cultivate a broader sense of self and self-interest, there is also something of unique value in situations that force one to confront one's peers and friends, that challenge one to demonstrate an independence of judgment that is willing to risk ridicule.   I do not see how we can get by without both kinds of courage.

Suggestions

It remains for me to try to draw from the above a few concrete suggestions. I think they are rather self-evident. The ever-increasing attention being paid to the role of reflection in the service-learning process, to helping students process their experiences from a variety of personal and social perspectives, should continue. We should, moreover, help them pay special attention to the windows and frames through which they view members of other groups. As is well known, many Americans are uncomfortable about discussing race. Especially nowadays, it is fashionable to pretend that if we just don't identify racial—or gender—differences, they will take care of themselves. I never cease to be amazed at the amount of effort required to get students to recognize the degree to which mass media images have influenced so many of their most basic social assumptions.

Second, we should make sure that the reflective processes we facilitate somewhere outside lead back to the situations closest at hand—the class, the program, the campus. My students may spend an entire semester working at a detox center in town without ever once thinking to connect what they see and learn there with situations that occur constantly in their dorms. We should try to ensure that what students learn about the way they frame their opinions of others does not remain group specific. I still remember vividly the case of one student who, after working intensively on racial stereotypes, came to see just how questionable her assumptions and projections were about a certain group. She then went away on spring break. When she returned, her first journal entry made it immediately apparent that what she had learned had not traveled well. All that she had learned not to do with one group, she had absolutely no compunction doing with another group.

A different set of suggestions revolves around our approach to off-campus service sites, and again ratifies a trend already under way. I refer here to what Keith Morton, associate director of Providence College's Feinstein Center for Public Service, has described as a shift in emphasis from placements to core partners: "Partners with whom the central relationship is intended to lead toward institutional interdependence" (Morton, session handout, 1995 NSEE National Conference). We have already seen one good example of such a core partnership in Penn's work with the schools of West Philadelphia. Another excellent example is the University of Santa Clara's Eastside Project, a program whose mission is "to create a lasting partnership between the university and the community that fosters continuing discussion

between both parties so that the Eastside Project is directly responsive to and shaped by the community" (*Santa Clara University's Eastside Project: Handbook of Information*, 1995, p. 14).

By investing substantial amounts of time, attention, and energy in a specific community, programs increase the likelihood that participating students will be able to interact with that community from several perspectives over an extended period of time. Thus, they stand a better chance of eventually experiencing it not simply as a locus of problems but as a complex web of social forces and interpersonal interactions. Although they may never be able to become authentic members of the community in question, they can at least begin to see and respect it as a functional whole. This, in turn, should help them better understand both the opportunities and the challenges facing their own on-campus community.

However, helping students move towards a more adequate appreciation of how community functions may well require more than a simple concentration of effort. In many instances it will also require a conscious commitment to bringing the full range of stakeholders into play. Mesa Community College in Arizona represents an excellent example of the proactive role service programs can play in actually facilitating communication between different groups in the surrounding communities. In the absence of such an effort, working with shelters and soup kitchens while ignoring local government, the police, and the chamber of commerce may not only result in an oversimplified understanding of homelessness as a social problem; it is also far more likely to result in "Band-Aid" service projects and activities that actually deepen community divisions. The work mentioned earlier with underserved communities just outside of town while undertaking nothing with the town's school system is a specific example of such a situation.

I would like to conclude with one final suggestion. If this article has any single governing idea, it is that we need to look more carefully—and perhaps honestly—at what we mean by community when we promote and facilitate service learning. We need to do this not only because we owe such care and honesty to our off-campus partners, but also because, unless we proceed in this way, we risk sending our students a confusing and perhaps even counterproductive message. For me, one of the powerful arguments for curricular-based service learning has always been that it implicitly insists that service and social engagement are not—in a figurative as well as a literal sense—extracurricular affairs. They do not follow the real work; they are an intrinsic

part of it.   In this way, service learning can help both students and faculty achieve a deeper integration of their values, their work, and their lives.

A genuinely thoughtful approach to the issue of community can do the same thing. If students are encouraged to see social responsibility and civic involvement only as something out there, they may go on to become concerned citizens—but citizens primarily concerned about what's happening in other people's neighborhoods. We all know how much easier it is to demand the integration of somebody else's school, the building of low-cost housing in somebody else's town, the opening of a halfway house on somebody else's street. When a service-learning program mobilizes to reach out while simultaneously neglecting problems of racism, gender violence, and environmental degradation at home, it may be inadvertently doing its part to make such hypocrisy more likely.

I would, therefore, suggest that we consciously try to maintain an active dialogue between our off-campus and on-campus concerns, that we not automatically exclude the latter from our service agenda, that, in fact, we invite members of the off-campus community to come on campus to help us address our problems! That, it seems to me, would represent real reciprocity. When the service, the learning, and even the outreach become in this way complementary, we may have finally arrived at that level of mutual understanding and respect that is the hallmark of true equality.

Suggested Readings

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