

**Teaching Citizenship Through Service-Learning
or
Why How You Teach Is As Important As What You Teach**

Great pleasure to be here and to have the opportunity to talk about the thing I like talking about best in political science--which is teaching.

And it really is teaching I want to talk about more than democratic theory or citizenship education per se.

In the year since I tried to step into Rick Battistoni's shoes as the director of CASE, the Rutgers Citizenship and Service Education program, I've read an awful lot of stuff about how American universities are rediscovering or re-claiming what was once their primary mission--the education of young people to be good citizens. But while much of what I've read was interesting, much of it also struck me as remarkably and sadly incomplete.

To put it bluntly, much of discussion about putting service, community and citizenship back into the curriculum seemed to me to be inappropriately--I might even say dangerously--focused on the **substance** of what professors are supposed to say to their students about citizenship, not on what students must learn actually to **be** good citizens. Put differently, much of what I've heard still seems way too close to traditional, passive-learning pedagogies, and to our traditional, professorial conceit that if we give our kids the facts, their hearts will follow--that is, that as professors we're only interested in their minds and all the rest of them belongs to student affairs.

Well, I think this is inappropriate, because we all know that it is not only **what** you teach, but **how** you teach it that produces the desired learning outcomes. And if you want students to learn about political science in general, or about citizenship in particular, then the structure of your course, your practice in the classroom, and the assignments you ask your students to complete must collectively push students personally to **engage** what they are learning, to **possess** it and so to **practice** it.

I think this is dangerous, because it matters not one wit how much Rousseau, de Tocqueville and Dewey students have read, or how well they have understood the dead-great-ones' arguments in the abstract, citizenship is **practice**--and inarticulate kids unable to think critically, to present their ideas force-

fully, or to handle themselves confidently in adult company simply cannot be and will not be good citizens.

And all this brings us to service-learning not merely as a pedagogy for teaching democracy (as the title of this session has it), but as a pedagogy for teaching **democrats**.

Here I think that it is essential that we rethink our role as teachers, that we greatly expand what we think it is our mission to teach--because if we don't we will not be able to teach democrats as well as democracy.

Now, traditionally, we professors have focused primarily, and in many cases exclusively, on imparting information or on teaching (if that's the right word) canonical readings of the "big books"--witness our fondness for lecturing and our single most common response to calls for innovation which is, of course, "but if I do that, I won't be able to get through all the material."

To a lesser extent, we professors have also paid at least lip service to the importance of teaching critical reading, thinking and writing skills--although a great many of us believe that this is really somebody else's business--witness our loud complaints about how ill-prepared our students are--can't read, can't think and can't write--that is, about how those others responsible for teaching them these skills left them unable to absorb the information we are here to impart.

But let's face it, folks, such a conception of our role and such an approach to teaching just don't cut it if what we want to do is to teach our students actually to be good citizens.

So again, I think we have to rethink our role as teachers, to redefine what it is we do so that we are able to meet the teaching task before us, that is, providing our students not with part, but with all of what they need to be democrats.

Put simply, I think that our teaching task is to give our students four things they need to be good citizens:

- We must teach them--help them to engage, understand and personalize--democratic theory. There is nothing natural or obvious about democracy,

democratic culture or democratic practice; they have to be learned, and so we have to teach them.

- We must teach them to read and think critically, and to write and speak compellingly. Democracy, after all, requires that citizens be able to understand both their own and their community's interests, and democratic process is, in effect, an on-going "conversation" among citizens as collectively they puzzle out the best course. And if people--our students, for example--lack these skills, democracy, so-called, becomes a dialogue of the deaf.
- We must teach them the civility, social skills and what de Tocqueville called the "arts of association" necessary to function successfully as active, fully participatory members of the community, and so help them to develop the self-esteem and self-confidence needed actually to participate. Again, there is nothing natural about these skills; they too must be learned. And as the families, churches, social clubs, neighborhood schools, unions and other community organizations which once taught civility, social skills and the arts of association decay, citizenship is imperiled--and it becomes increasingly imperative that we take up the burden.
- Finally, we must teach them community, if you will, teach them a democrat's most important "habit of the heart," that reflexive sense of connectedness to others that forms the bedrock of community and is the essence of citizenship.

So, the question is, how exactly do you achieve all this? Well, here we come back to service-learning not as a pedagogy for teaching citizenship, but as **the** pedagogy for doing so.

Now, when I talk about a service-learning course, I am not talking about your regular, three credit course with a soft and cuddly service internship attached at the margin. I'm talking about a course in which **service** and **learning**, **community** and **classroom**, are fully integrated with one another to create a pedagogical Eisensteinian $1 + 1 = 3$ learning montage.

There are three basic pieces to such an integrated service-learning course:

- ◆ First, there's the classroom piece. In preparing such a class, you must think imaginatively about service placements for your students that will enhance their learning experience, that is, will both broaden and deepen their understanding of the academic material you are trying to impart. And, no less important, you must think about how you are going to re-shape your presentation of course material in order to set your students up to "reality check" it at their placements.
- ◆ Second, there's the service placement itself. Here you want placements that will not only engage your students in real, useful community service, but will at the same time force them to confront the complex, ambiguous human realities that lie behind the often very abstract materials they are studying in the classroom.
- ◆ And finally, third, there's the reintegration process. This, I think, is the real key to the whole service-learning experience. Here you ask your students to process what they've seen and done at their service placement in terms relevant to your course. In effect, you ask them to forge a direct link between service and learning, and between the classroom and the world beyond its walls. Put differently, you show them the real world relevance of their classroom learning, and make them into practicing citizens in their communities.

So how does this address the teaching task before us?

- What better way to get your students really to engage the issues of power, civil society, equality vs. liberty or whatever you're presenting in the classroom than to put them in a situation where they see and engage these issues as they appear in the lives of real human beings they care about?
- What better way to get your students to master the substance of your course than to put them in a situation where that substance is essential to their ability to do their jobs as service providers and so, in fact, as participating citizens?
- What better way to get your students to understand the importance of an ability to read, think, speak and write critically than to put them in a situation where these skills are critical to their ability to get the job done?

- What better way to get your students to learn the arts of association than to put them in a situation where their ability to be part of a team has an important impact on an agency's ability to render critically needed services to people in need?
- What better way to make your students real members of their community rather than mere observers of it than to give them an equity stake in the community, than to make them into true stake holders, rather than free loaders.

I've gone on too long already, but let me make one last comment about the challenge we confront as teachers. The renewed interest in teaching citizenship which is sweeping universities today and undoubtedly explains why many of you are here at this ungodly hour is, I think, a healthy and long overdue rediscovery of a critical mission of American higher education. But the turn to service-learning, and efforts to get faculty to broaden their conception of the teaching mission are equally important and overdue. For twenty five years, we have seen the academy become more and more divorced from the community at large, and more and more divided internally as disciplines and knowledge have become increasingly specialized. And, as a result, our students, temporary sojourners in our domain, itinerant representatives of the broader community, have suffered as they have, in effect, been dissected into thinner and thinner slices, each little slice addressed in isolation without regard to the whole. Well, today, perhaps--I hope--we have begun to put our students back together, begun to think of them a wholes--that's with a "w"--and to address ourselves again to educating the whole student, not merely our little slice of him or her.

Thank you.

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