CIVIC LEARNING VIA SERVICE-LEARNING:

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY TO LINKING SERVANT LEADERSHIP THEORY TO THE CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY POLICING

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"A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences." (Dewey, 1916: p. 101).

Abstract

Nexus problems continue to impede the successful application of academic theory to the real world dynamics of professional practice. Emergent conflicts, tensions, and dissensions are identified in Williams' (2002) examination of coupling the theory of servant leadership with the contemporary practice of community policing. This paper offers service-learning as an option to better train future police practitioners. The authors argue that a civic learning via service-learning approach to train pre- and in-service local law enforcement officers may be better suited to bridging the theory – practice divide

and enhancing the application of servant leadership principles in the contemporary practice of community policing.

Introduction

Overcoming the praxis dilemmas and the nexus problems that often accompany the convergence of sterile and orderly theories with professional practice in mucky and muddled political environments continues to be a problem for public administration practitioners and practitioners of other applied disciplines. These challenges are illuminated in Williams' (2002) essay, which examines coupling the theory of servant leadership with the contemporary practice of community policing. His article reveals certain points of linkage, highlights places of conflict and dissension and identifies those "Judas opportunities" and "Judas possibilities" that could emerge from misguided intentions of officers. These intentions could result in police officers "serving for fun and profit" - behaviors that contradict the guiding philosophy of community policing and is at odds with the current paradigm of the post-bureaucratic era of government (Patterson, 2002).

Williams concludes his essay by conceding the compatibility of servant leadership theory with community policing practice, acknowledging the obstacles and problems that arise from the coercive nature of some aspects of policing, and by raising a series of professional, practical, and ethical questions:

- To whom should the (community policing) servant leader be accountable?
- Is servant leadership an innate quality or characteristic?

- If not, can it be learned?
- Can servant leadership be captured in a professional training curriculum?
- Can servant leadership be measured? If so, how?
- Who and what should be used to evaluate the performance of servant leaders?
- How can public organizations prevent the "Judas opportunities and possibilities?"

These questions relate to the more general, servant leadership or "steward leadership" questions of Smith (2000) and speak to two major issues: (1) what constitutes effective training for servant leadership and (2) what forms of performance monitoring, auditing, and surveillance are needed and appropriate to defer and/or detect the emerging "Judases."

This essay will focus on question 1, thereby, we assume that servant leadership is not an innate quality or characteristic, but can be captured in a training curriculum. Furthermore, we propose that servant leadership and its notions of stewardship can be taught, and learned by pre- and in-service police officers. Hence, our paper seeks to build upon the scrutiny of Williams (2002) by exploring what constitutes effective training for servant leadership, in general, and what methodology or orientation to training may aid in better connecting the ethics and values of servant leadership in the application of community policing, in particular. In the following paragraphs, we propose, conceptualize, and briefly describe a framework and a methodology for effectively coupling the moral principles of servant leadership with the contemporary practice of community policing.

The Framework: Civic Learning as Moral

Learning

The Reemergence and Benefits of Civic Learning

Barber (1993), Putnam (1995) and other scholars note the decline of civic-engagement in American society and argue that the lack of community service may account for this trend in students. The views of these intellectuals and others like Lisman (1998), Reeher and Cammarano (1997), and Battistoni (1997), have revived and re-energized academic discussions around the topic of civic education or civic learning and the importance of incorporating these pedagogical approaches within secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. These scholars see this as a pragmatic and viable way to revitalize our democracy and facilitate the development of a more civil society.

Other scholars have amplified the values and contributions of civic education or civic learning. In particular, they have noted the close connections between civic learning and moral learning. Ehrlich (1997) defines civic learning as the process of gaining a deeper understanding of how a community works and how to make it work better. He views moral learning as the process of "reinforcing the elements of character that leads to ethical actions. These elements include: respect for the autonomy and dignity of others, compassion and kindness, honesty and integrity, and a commitment to equity and fairness" (p.61). Applying Ehrlich's postulate, we see that civic learning is dependent upon moral learning; therefore, civic learning cannot occur without moral learning. This connection is reinforced by the findings of Coles (1993) and Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996), who were able to demonstrate that civic and moral learning via community service helps students to embrace active citizenship and

think about themselves in relation to others within their community. These findings underscore the value of learning through service or service-learning and calls for more attention to be given to the theoretical underpinnings of this methodology.

The Methodology: Service Learning

Service-Learning – An Introduction and Overview

Learning through service or service-learning is a relatively new academic concept. The phrase "service-learning" was coined in 1967, but its popularity is commonly attributed to the public governance and civic education revival of the early 1990s. To many, the conceptualization of service-learning represents an amalgamation of pedagogy, philosophy, and methodology. Consequently, defining it proves to be a difficult task.

In general, service-learning is a form of experiential education in which individuals engage in service or community based activities that address human and community needs. These activities are coupled with structured opportunities that are intentionally designed to promote learning and advance intellectual, moral, and civic growth through the processes of reflection and reciprocity. Service, within this context, assumes that cognitive, affective, and moral growth are inseparable. Hence, service-learning is education and training grounded on experience as a basis for learning whose pedagogy rests on tenants professed by Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), and other early experiential learning theorists.

John Dewey

Frequently accredited for conceiving the concept of experiential education, Dewey believed that education must be grounded in experience and that learning is reinforced by experience. As such, experiential education is that learning process that takes place beyond the traditional classroom and enhances the personal, professional, and intellectual growth of students (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). Its goal is to develop a free and powerful individual from this learning process, one who is able to springboard into higher levels or stages of civic and moral development in adulthood.

Dewey's notion of experiential education sought to transform the way knowledge is transmitted so that individuals may become active participants, instead of passive participants, in their learning and professional growth. Learning, he asserts, is a dynamic and dialectical process, integrating experience and concepts, observations and action, learning and being taught (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). Its ultimate goal was to help individuals make sense out of their experiences. This pragmatic approach to education was one that sought to unite knowing to doing by creating "an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (1938).

David Kolb

The work of cognitive psychologist David Kolb builds upon the work of Dewey and remains central to the validation of experiential education (i.e., service-learning) approaches as effective learning and potential training tools. Contrary to Dewey's belief that learning is reinforced by experience, Kolb saw learning beginning with experience proclaiming that learning involves more than experience alone. In his book, Experiential Learning,

Kolb (1984) argues that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38) and the interplay of reflection and meaningful action serve as essential components of the learning process.

Learning, according to Kolb, occurs in a four-stage cycle of behaviors involving four adaptive learning modes: concrete experience, reflection on experience, synthesis and abstract generalization or conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Kolb and Fry (1975) posit that the learning cycle can begin at any on of the four positions because learning occurs within a continuous spiral. However, it is frequently suggested that the learning cycle begins with a concrete experience otherwise referred to as a common or shared experience. Following this experience, reflective observation is facilitated through intentional, directed and structured reflective engagement in an effort to begin reflecting upon common experiences. The subsequent phase, abstract conceptualization, provides the individual(s) with an opportunity to apply concepts, models, and theory to understand and supply viable explanations of the focal experience. Active experimentation ensues granting an occasion to test, evaluate, and re-conceptualize one's understanding of the experience derived through the abstract conceptualization process. The cycle naturally reinitiates with exposure to a novel experience and/or challenging issue.

Kolb's Model of Learning

Service-learning, as a form of experiential education, builds upon Kolb's foundational model of learning with a direct aim to connect community to the educational environment. Incorporating and activating the

core constructs of reciprocity and reflection, this form of experiential education seeks to both promote and maximize an individual's development and learning by connecting service to learning and theory to practice. Reflection serves as the linking agent to service.

Critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration skills are strengthened through service-learning involvement. The interplay between community and intellectual engagement promotes public discourse, community building, and civic engagement. Diversity is embraced while simultaneously espousing an ethic of personal accountability and social responsibility. The intentional integration of intra- and inter-personal development with civic, moral, cognitive, and academic development renders a holistic conceptualization of learning.

Differentiation of the service-based programs resides in the degree and direction of reciprocity in both learning attained and service rendered. Specifically, each program type is further defined by the intended beneficiary of the service activity and its degree of emphasis on service and/or learning (Furco, 1996). Service-learning programs are distinguished from other experiential approaches by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service while pledging equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. This two-tiered equilibrium is achieved when the service-learning program adequately ensures reciprocity of service and learning - where both the service informs the learning and the learning informs the service.

The Challenge

Billig and Furco (2002) note that service-learning, in its most traditional sense, is an approach to teaching and learning that involves students performing community service and engaging in field education as a means for achieving academic goals or objectives. Learning emerges from the combinations of thought and action, reflection and practice, theory and application - a cycle of action and reflection. Consequently, students began to "know what" as well as to "know how." These boundary-spanning benefits, as noted by the research of Steinke, Fitch, Johnson, and Waldstein (2002), Waskiewicz (2002), Covitt (2002), Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996), Coles (1993) and others, have led to a clarion call to institutionalize this scholarship of engagement within higher education (Boyer, 1987; Furco, 2002). However, the application of civic learning through service-learning beyond the walls of the academy and its classroom constructs remains largely unexplored. We see the value in going beyond the current institutional boundary of civic learning via service-learning and propose incorporating it within the practitioner training environment, in general, and the training environments for community policing officers as servant leaders, in particular.

Challenges are associated with spanning this academic teaching – practitioner training divide and in transforming those goals and objectives of the academy to ones that fit practitioner training. This application of the academic to the pragmatic realities of local law enforcement is not without risks and mirrors the struggle that Williams (2002) noted in attempts to apply the sacred principles of servant leadership within the secular environment and context of community policing. Particular risks in this case include: (1) overcoming the dominant and more insular training traditions, approaches, and philosophy that currently exists within law enforcement;

(2) gaining the support of those more seasoned police officers and middle managers who have been acculturated by the present day framework and methodology; and (3) securing community buy-in, while overcoming citizen/community skepticism that is rooted in their historical and present day realities. These risks reflect the need for organizational, professional, and communal buy-in as a necessary prerequisite for local law enforcement to successfully collaborate with and enter into the classrooms of the community.

We, like Dewey, Kolb, Giles, Eyler, Boyer, and others see the academic value of civic learning as moral learning and civic learning through curricular interplay of community and classroom. Service-learning represents one such method championing these academic goals. The rewards in applying this scholarship of engagement, in terms of facilitating a more safe and civil society that emerges from increased and sustained collaboration between the police and citizens or communities, far outweigh the risks we have presented. We see the rewards of utilizing this framework and methodology as being more efficacious on a broader societal scale in the training of those pre- and in-service street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). For this reason, we propose the framework and methodology of civic learning via service-leaning to assist in connecting the principles of servant leadership with the practice of community policing. We see such a connection as not only enhancing the collaboration and co-production of public safety and public order, but also building a stronger democracy and a more civil American society.

Conclusion

John Dewey viewed American democracy and education as inexorably entangled. He noted, "A

democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences" (1916; p.101). We agree with Dewey's assessment and have proposed a model that draws from the philosophy, framework, and methodology of Dewey, Kolb, and others. However, we seek to connect the current discussion within the "theoretical" academy with the more practical or "practitioner" oriented academy of local law enforcement. Our proposed model is one that draws from civic learning via service-learning, with its focus on meaningful action, reciprocity and reflection. Based upon its success in the academic learning environment, we see this framework and methodology as a means of fostering the civic learning as moral learning needed in realizing servant leadership or ethical stewardship within local law enforcement practices. This may be one way to better connect the moral principles of servant leadership with the practice of community policing in the mucky and muddled environments in which these public servants operate. Exploring and strategizing ways to minimize the risks and overcome the barriers to reach the rewards of civic engagement, police-citizen partnership, and public governance is the challenge that must be considered.

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