Moving Like a Starfish:
Beyond a Unilinear Model of Student Transformation in Service Learning Classes

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*"I imagine that starfish don't think about alternatives, like left or right, forward or back;
they'd think in terms of five kinds of lefts and rights, five kinds of backs and forths."*
Ursula LeGuin (2003, 170)

Abstract

This article argues that the proponents of service learning courses see "perspective transformation" as the ideal goal of such courses. Most commonly this transformation is viewed as a linear trajectory "from charity to social justice."   However, this frame of reference is inadequate to the complex ways in which students change through the agency of service learning, particularly in the area of their moral development. The article suggests a new, more adequate frame of reference for transformation: "enabling the starfish to move."

Linear trajectories as metaphors for the transformation of selves can be quite seductive. They present clear beginnings and endings. However tortuous the path in between, there is a consequent sense of direction. Discourse about the transformation of students in service-learning contexts, despite a burgeoning number of studies, most commonly resorts to a linear model. In its simplest terms, transformation is seen as a trajectory "from charity to social justice."

This paper will critique this linear model and present an alternative: a multilinear perspective on student transformation in service learning classes. In a recent one of her mind-bending short stories, Ursula LeGuin contrasts our view of language as a forward-march from the beginning to the end of a sentence with her fictional people's understanding of language as a "starfish" for which there is no forward or back, left or right, no "either/or." Instead movement can be in multiple and shifting directions (LeGuin, 2003, 170). I will propose in this paper that we think also of the transformation of students in service learning classes, most particularly the moral transformation of students, as akin to LeGuin's starfish, that is, as a complex but integrated movement along several vectors.

Service Learning as Transformative Learning

This thesis presupposes an underlying awareness of what it means to say that learning, through service or otherwise, can be transformative. Much of learning is additive, providing new content within habitual ways of viewing reality. What Robert Kegan calls

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"informational" learning also can develop new skills and apply old categories to new terrains of inquiry. Such learning "fills out" a pre-existing form, which includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Kegan, 2000, 46-49). Jack Mezirow and a generation of followers have developed, in contrast, an understanding of transformational learning. What is transformational learning? According to Mezirow, transformational learning is an "alteration of our *frame of reference,*" that is, "the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions" (2000, 16).[2] It includes the frequently tacit beliefs, attitudes, and judgments that determine how we interpret events and places them within causal frameworks. For the purposes of understanding civic engagement through service learning, it is important to note that frames of reference "suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically unless brought into critical reflection" (Mezirow, 2000, 18).

Experiences whether sudden and dramatic—in Mezirow's terms "epochal"—or incremental—a slowly dawning awareness of the inadequacy of how we know and feel the world and act within it—can call into question frames of reference. Questioning, in turn, launches a struggle to construct a more "dependable" frame of reference. "A more dependable frame of reference," Mezirow argues, "is one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience" (2000, 19).

Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles, the leading team of researchers on the impact of service learning on students, recognize that transformational learning is rare in comparison to informational learning. Nevertheless, they, and many others, myself included, see a transformation of one's perspective on self and society as the premier goal of service learning classes. In their research about one-third of students involved in such classes claim and appear to have undergone such a transformation (Eyler and Giles, 1999, 148-49).[3] Eyler and Giles spend an entire chapter in their analysis of the impact of service learning discussing the ways in which this pedagogy provides a "perspective transformation" (1999, 129-150). They measured perspective transformation by investigating the following: a) "the extent to which students come to see social problems from a systemic rather than an individually focused perspective," b) "their sense that a pressing need in our society is 'to achieve greater social justice,'" c) the degree to which students saw changing public policy as the most important form of service, and d) the students' sense that "it is important to me personally to influence the political structure" (1999, 135-36). In Mezirow's terms, Eyler and Giles, like all of us, operate within a specific frame of reference when they discuss "perspective transformation."   That frame of reference views the deepest transformation as an alteration in "student perceptions of the locus of social problems . . . their belief in the importance of social justice, the need to change public policy, and the need to influence the political structure personally" (1999, 149).

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[2] The terminology used by theorists of transformation is fluid and, therefore, confusing on occasion. As we will see, Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles use the term "perspective transformation" (1999, 129-50). This term is generally synonymous with the notion of a transformation of a frame of reference (Taylor, 2000, 287).

[3] Throughout this paper I will make reference to Eyler and Giles's work. There are numerous other researchers who also reflect the frame of reference that Eyler and Giles employ. However, the work of this team represents the most complex and variegated analysis of the impact of service learning on students and, therefore, the frame of reference most worthy of being challenged. In emphasizing the power of service learning to transform, Eyler and Giles echo the proponents of civic engagement who list service learning as one of several "pedagogies of engagement" that are critical for educating citizens (Colby, et al., 2003, 20-21).

To be sure, undergoing such a transformation from this frame of reference is a complex process. It requires, for example, the development of a deep sense of empathy. In Eyler and Giles's analysis, empathy is viewed in sharp contrast to charity.

> [A] student who spent a week living in a homeless shelter commented on his shift from providing charity to wanting to become involved in community change: "There was a lot of talking with them and with their kids and realizing they are exactly the same . . . . [A]t that point I just lost my desire to "help" them. I guess it grew into a desire to work with people rather than to work for them." (1999, 142)

Ellen Skilton-Sylvester and Eileen Erwin (2000), like many others who see transformation as one from "charity" to "change" (cf. Kahne and Westheimer, 1999, 33-34), argue for the importance of caring relationships to move students along the trajectory. "In order to build meaningful relationships and (make a difference,) students involved in service-learning programs need to move beyond a 'charity' orientation through the building of caring relationships and critical reflection" (2000, 68, 72). In other words a "charity" orientation is contrasted not only with a social justice orientation but also with what, arguably, invites students to move along the trajectory, i.e., empathy, and what empowers them to move, i.e., caring relationships and critical reflection. While many students fail to carry the process to its completion, the goal of perspective transformation remains intact:

> Community experiences that challenge student assumptions coupled with thoughtful reflection may lead to fundamental changes in the way the student views service or society . . . . *As students mature in their service experience, they tend to move from a focus on charitable activities to a concern for social justice.* (Eyler and Giles, 1999, 18-19, italics added)

A Dissenting Voice: Morton's Three Paradigms of Service

How do we begin to deconstruct this frame of reference? More precisely, on what grounds should we do so? In several articles, Keith Morton has offered an alternative to what he agrees is "a dominant motif in the literature of community service," namely the charity to social justice trajectory (2002, 46). Morton's reconsideration of service learning as a transformative experience was prompted by an experience in a service-learning class. One student described what was most important about her tutoring was her relationship with a fourth grader named Susan. Morton's initial response—like that of many of us—was predictable. "It is important," he said, "for you to think about root causes, to think about why Susan needs you in the first place. 'I understand what you are saying,' she responded, 'but what is important right now is that she likes me'" (2002, 46). In more abstract terms, the student understood the importance of systemic reflection but she had her own moral agenda and that was to build a reciprocal, caring relationship with a child growing up in a very different context (cf. Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin, 2000). This dramatic experience led Morton to formulate an alternative to the prevailing model.

> I am arguing . . . that assumptions about progress are a powerful element in how many practitioners structure and assess their service-learning courses and programs. I want to argue, as well, that *the ideas of a continuum and progress from charity to advocacy do not square with how people do service or why they do it*. Rather than a continuum, I want to suggest that three relatively distinct paradigms of service exist, what I will call charity, project development and social change . . . . Each paradigm is based upon

distinctive worldviews, ways of identifying and addressing problems and long term visions of individual and community transformation . . . . Educationally, this means that rather than moving students along a continuum, we are doing two things simultaneously: challenging and supporting students to enter more deeply into the paradigm in which they work, and intentionally exposing students to creative dissonance among the three forms. (1995, 20-21, italics added) [4]

This paper is deeply indebted to Morton's critique and alternative model. However, I will suggest below that the language of "paradigms" may be too restrictive. In my experience students are quite capable of working within several "models" simultaneously or, at least, sequentially. In their cases, development is a more complex deepening of character and action within several models of praxis.

Given this analysis, I can now assert the thesis of this paper more boldly:

- Service learning claims to be a form of transformative learning
- Most commonly, proponents see this transformation as a shift from a charity to a social justice frame of reference
- This frame of reference is inadequate to the complex ways in which students change through the agency of service learning
- This paper suggests a new, more adequate, frame of reference for transformation in service learning courses: Enabling the starfish to move

When "Charity" is Not Charity: A Critique of the Prevailing Model from the Point of View of Religious and Spiritual Traditions

In creating the charity/social justice trajectory, the proponents of service learning are focusing upon *two* separable aspects of the service relationship. The first has to do with the motivation, attitude, behavior, in short, the moral identity of the one who serves. The "charitable" relationship with the other is viewed as a form of self-aggrandizement. "God, [or society— substitute your preferred concept for the Raw Dealer] may have given you a raw deal," the charitable self implies, "but I am here to treat you better." "Charity," then, is viewed as an umbrella term for a condescending, patronizing, one-way relationship that reinforces social hierarchies and encourages dependency.

To be sure, students, however well intentioned, do frequently exhibit some of these traits. Service learning classes themselves are prone to "deficit analyses" of the communities that are served, that is, viewing communities and those who live there in terms of problems, needs, and lack of resources rather than in terms of assets, internal resources, and capacities that can be drawn upon.[5] A shift from a one-way "helping" relationship to a reciprocal relationship *is* an important goal in service learning classes. However, if we turn to the spiritual and religious traditions that have fostered charity, we have to conclude that "charity"—as articulated in the service learning literature—is not Charity, that is, it is not, for example, what Christians have meant by *caritas* or *agape*. It is not, to cite one more example, what Buddhists have meant by *karuna,* compassion or *maitri*, loving kindness.

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[4] I prefer to use the term "capacity building model" for Morton's "project development" paradigm and "social justice model" for his term "social change" paradigm.

[5] The development of community partnerships for service learning classes at DePaul has been heavily influenced by the "asset-based" model proposed by John Kretzman and John McKnight (1993).

My own work focuses upon praxis-centered Christian theologies and Buddhist theories of social engagement. For example, Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian theologian whose *A Theology of Liberation* (1988) defined a whole new frame of reference for Christian reflection, sees a "conversion to the neighbor" as the sacramental heart of an engaged Christian life (1988, 115). Conversion or "*metanoia*" entails a change of heart, or, as Gutierrez puts it, a "melting" of the heart. Charity does not exist outside of human fellowship. Gutierrez explicitly criticizes as a "discredited" model of charity one in which the person "was more interested in the action that *he* was performing than in the concrete person for whom it was done" (1988, 114). Finally Gutierrez bridges the divide between charity and social justice when he affirms the necessity of avoiding "the pitfalls of an individualistic charity . . . . [T]he neighbor is not only a person viewed individually. The term refers also to a person situated in the fabric of social relationships . . . . It likewise refers to the exploited social class, the dominated people, the marginated . . . . Charity is today a 'political charity'" (1988, 116).

In the teachings of contemporary engaged Buddhists, like the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, compassion emerges from the awareness of the radical non-duality of self and other, self and world. To be in touch with reality, with others, is to recognize that we "inter-are." Such an awareness scours away any sense of *noblesse oblige*, any patronizing or condescending attitude, any trace of moral superiority.

> The truth is that . . . [w]e can only inter-be; we cannot just be. And we are responsible for everything that happens around us . . . . In the *Majjima Nikaya* there is a very short passage on how the world has come to be. It is very simple . . . and yet very deep. "This is, because that is. This is not, because that is not. This is like this because that is like that . . . ." Let us look at wealth and poverty. The affluent society and the society deprived of everything inter-are. The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of the other. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998, 32-34)

Actions arising out of loving kindness (*maitri*) and social justice advocacy are not antithetical or even separable approaches to service.

> Exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression come in many forms and cause much suffering. The moment we commit ourselves to cultivating loving kindness, loving kindness is born in us, and we make every effort to stop those things. Loving kindness . . . is the intention and capacity to bring joy and happiness to another person or living being. But even with *maitri* as a source of energy in us . . . we have to . . . come together as a community to examine our situation, exercising our intelligence and ability to look deeply so that we can discover appropriate ways to express *maitri* in the midst of real problems. (1998, 49-50)

Discovering the appropriate way to express *maitri* is, to be sure, a complex process, but it is not one that can be characterized as a trajectory *from* charity as the deficient beginning, *to* social justice, as the ideal end.

Nel Noddings, building upon the work of Carol Gilligan (1993), presents a "care ethic" that, while not explicitly religious, certainly reflects a deep spiritual engagement. Noddings sees "care" as arising out of a "relational ontology" (2002, 15). We exist and thrive within caring relationships which we strive to maintain and expand. Rather than focusing on the cultivation of a virtuous self (which can easily fall into the trap that Gutierrez described of charitable action as a form of self-aggrandizement) the caring self is other-regarding. Noddings states this point of view strongly by quoting Simone Weil:

> The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him, "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled "unfortunate," but as a man, exactly like us . . . . This way of looking is first of all attentive. The self empties itself of its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. (Weil as cited in Noddings, 2002, 17) [6]

Notice in this quotation the emphasis is on receptivity not upon the self as a beneficent donor. There is a moral discipline involved in an authentic encounter with another ("the self empties itself of its own contents"). So whether we talk about conversion to the neighbor, interbeing or authentic love, it is clear that the stereotype of "charity," as a composite of moral motivations and behaviors, which is presented in the service learning discourse in juxtaposition with social justice seeking, is crudely reductive.

Fishes and Babies: Re-examining the Treatment of Charity as Inadequate Action

Framing service learning transformation as a trajectory from charity to social justice implies more than a critique of a self-regarding, condescending attitude. It also entails a critique of the inadequacy of charitable *actions.* Faced with systemic injustice, we perceive charitable service as "band aid" solutions. The stories we tell in our service-learning classes are frequently the most obvious tip-offs to what we have assumed within our frame of reference about *effective* moral action. So, from the standpoint of Morton's second paradigm, service as capacity-building action, the story most frequently told is that which contrasts feeding others fish and teaching them how to fish. Here the seeming inadequacy of charitable action is made plain: Feed a fish and people eat for one day; teach them how to fish and they feed themselves every day.

However, capacity-building service is not without ambiguity which may be criticized from the standpoint of both Morton's charity and social justice standpoints. Teaching someone how to fish takes time. If people are starving, they need fish to eat while we engage in "capacity building." Moreover, there will always be those members of a society, the most deeply vulnerable—the terminally ill, for example—for whom the simple expression of compassion is most required. Should our students not be engaged with those whose capacity for autonomous growth has been compromised? Are there not transformative lessons to be learned at the bedside of the dying?

From the standpoint of the social justice advocate as well, teaching someone to fish presumes that the person a) has access to a lake, b) that a corporate conglomerate has not fished out that lake and c) that our industrial waste has not poisoned all of the fish. Teaching someone to fish, in other words, presupposes a redistribution of power within a society or, at least, sufficient unexploited nooks and crannies (untapped lakes) where new fisheries can be established. Capacity building, in other words, requires both compassionate service and social justice advocacy.

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[6] Each of these treatments of charity, compassion, or loving kindness exhibits a religious or spiritual dimension that deepens the moral point of view. Courtenay and associates similarly suggest that the development of other-centeredness in caring service can reflect "an orientation to a universal, self-transcendent view of the meaning of one's existence." In this regard they argue that Mezirow's account of transformation of one's frame of reference should be modified to include a transformed sense of "spirituality, transpersonal development and compassion for others" (Courtenay et al., 1998).

In terms of the social justice model, the same reciprocity with compassionate service and capacity building is required. The story that I most often tell to encourage the development of a systemic, social justice-perspective is that of the babies in the river. You've heard of it, I'm sure. Two persons see a baby in the river and rush in to rescue her. To their dismay this baby is followed by another. Then another and another. In each case the two moral heroes dive in to save the baby. Finally, one person does not rush back into the river but heads upstream. Her partner asks, "Where are you going? I need help rescuing these babies." To which she replies, "I am going to find out who is throwing the babies in the river."

This story, certainly, represents a truly important lesson on the necessity to seek out the roots of suffering and oppression. However, I usually add a coda to the story. The person headed upstream discovers not an evil individual but a baby factory. Most of the workers are dimly aware, if at all, of the consequences of their actions. The factory, in turn, is part of an entire social system. It will not be dismantled and rebuilt in a single day, or quarter or semester. Meanwhile, those babies keep coming. "Aren't you glad," I ask my students at this point, "that someone has stayed behind to rescue those babies?" Unconditional love in the present moment demands (a categorical imperative, if you will) that we not neglect those suffering here and now while searching for the roots of injustice. "Besides which," the capacity-builder will chime in, "baby factories are not dismantled and rebuilt by single individuals nor can one person rescue all of those babies. We need someone who will train more rescuers and more dismantlers." A case in point: Dr. Paul Farmer and his organization, Partners in Health, have combined direct medical service to the Western hemisphere's poorest people in rural Haiti with a global campaign to eradicate tuberculosis. When accused of merely treating symptoms, they offered

> to "make common cause" with anyone sincerely trying to change the "political economies" of countries like Haiti. But it didn't follow . . . that good works without revolution only prolonged the status quo, that the only thing projects like Partners in Health really accomplish is the creation of "dependency." The poor were suffering . . . . Partners in Health believed in sending resources from the United States to Haiti, down the steep gradient pf inequality, so as to provide services to the desperately poor— directly, now. They called this "pragmatic solidarity." (Kidder, 2003, 100-101)

Simply stated, social justice work alone can end up sacrificing the present generation for the sake of a utopian future. Each form of service presents an opportunity for transformative learning and praxis, for "pragmatic solidarity." Each requires other forms of praxis to overcome its own ambiguities.

Multilinear Movement: The Critique from the Point of View of Moral Development Theory

Whatever the deficiencies of its frame of reference, Eyler and Giles's work is, nevertheless, the best analysis of the complex developmental process that students potentially undergo in a service learning course. However, Eyler and Giles do not treat the issue of moral development directly. In a chapter on "personal and interpersonal development," they do address outcomes of service learning that imply moral transformation, among which are reduction of stereotypes, increase in tolerance for diversity, greater self-knowledge and spiritual growth, an empowering sense of self as agent, an interest in pursuing a career of service, communication and leadership skills, and a deeper sense of "community connectedness" (1999, 54-56). Along with Morton, Eyler and Giles recognize that "[l]earning often begins with a very personal connection to another." "Students often bubble over with stories about the homeless

man they helped with dinner, the little girl they helped overcome her shyness during a semester of tutoring, the person living with HIV who taught them the intricacies of obtaining medical care in a complicated system" (1999, 25). While acknowledging the importance of this growing sense of compassion, Eyler and Giles still reflexively impose the defective charity to positive social justice transformational framework on their analysis. "When students have the opportunity to work with community members in planning service, they can move beyond the rather patronizing role of charity giver to the role of partner" (1999, 47).

What exactly is the issue here? Certainly, I do not wish to slight the importance of developing a sense of partnership, of what Farmer calls "pragmatic solidarity." My concern is akin to that of Morton: When your own empirical studies indicate that students' moral development occurs along multiple vectors, why resort to a framework that oversimplifies that development, especially when there are theories of moral development that indicate how transformation along those vectors may be seen as a unified movement—moving like a starfish?

Moral development theories and the empirical studies that support them have moved well beyond the debate between proponents of Lawrence Kohlberg's justice-framework and Carol Gilligan's care ethic (Kohlberg, 1971, 1981; Gilligan, 1993). Rather than viewing Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories as rival paradigms, many scholars of moral development see each of them as powerful articulations of *one* of multiple vectors along which a person develops a moral identity. Kohlberg himself, for example, has acknowledged that his emphasis on the development of moral judgment is only one component of moral agency and that reaching a higher level moral judgment alone does not motivate one to act (Kohlberg and Candee, 1984; Rest, et al., 1999, 9-33). More recent studies suggest that a moral life requires the integration of a number of components. While these studies range from suggesting three to seven components, I have found it useful to adopt a four-fold schema developed by James Rest and his associates:

- Moral *sensitivity*—The ability to recognize a situation as having a moral character, the adoption of a moral point of view. Awareness that a given circumstance *lays a claim on me to do what is right or good.*
- Moral *judgment*—The capacity to reason towards an understanding of what in the given situation would constitute the best possible moral action. The capacity to come to such a conclusion by taking into account the complexities, uncertainties, and ambiguities latent in this context.
- Moral *motivation*—The commitment to taking the moral course of action in the given circumstance, taking upon oneself personal responsibility for acting in a given circumstance. The recognition that one's own identity is deeply connected with taking such action.
- Moral *character*—The capacity to persist in acting morally so that one's actions *appear* to be "natural" and to arise "spontaneously" from the depths of the self. The integration over time of the multiple components of a moral self. (Rest, 1984; Rest, et al., 1999, 100-103; cf. Blasi, 1984)

Building upon studies of those who have sustained their commitment to civic engagement over decades, Anne Colby and her associates recognize the importance of such an integration of multiple components.

Clearly, understanding and judgment are essential elements of moral and civic maturity, but they are not sufficient to explain what makes a morally and civically effective person. Some people with very advanced levels of understanding fail to act on their understanding. These people may have the *capacity* for effective action while lacking the

motivation to act. Like understanding, motivation is multifaceted and includes values and goals; identity, or sense of self; a sense of efficacy or empowerment; faith; and various aspects of moral emotion such as hope and optimism, as opposed to alienation and cynicism. (Colby, et al., 2003, 112, 117-18)

Colby insists that moral and civic education should address as many of these components as possible in an integrated manner and despite the fact that students may vary significantly in their multifaceted development. Reflection in service learning courses should facilitate development along multiple vectors (2003, 99-100). Central to the argument of this paper is my conviction that the charity to social justice framework undermines the complex process of moral development that can, indeed, be catalyzed by service learning courses. It does so by stereotyping the student as starting from a deficient state of being and doing instead of striving to understand where that student is along each of multiple vectors. It, consequently, begins by addressing students' weaknesses instead of building upon their strengths. It fails to recognize that the integration of well developed moral components into one's core self is a labor over time (starfish are not rabbits) (Colby et al., 2003, 117). Finally, by positing a social justice orientation as the idealized goal, this linear model obscures the ways in which love, compassion and "pragmatic solidarity" catalyze this lengthy process. In any moral process the goal, in turn, reflects and contains the means.

The Starfish Moves: Addressing the Possibilities for Moral Transformation in Service Learning Classes

Very early in my efforts to engage in the pedagogy of service learning, one text—a student's reflection on her initial experience of service—encapsulated for me the kinds of moral reflection that service can set in motion. I come back to this text again and again as I try to think through how I might facilitate student learning along multiple vectors. Christina, an exemplary student, had asked for and received my permission to involve herself with a Salvation Army program to feed poor people—not an ideal placement from my own justice-oriented point of view. Here is what she said after a single experience on the south side of Chicago:

We handed out sandwiches and apples and juice to ANYONE who came up to the van. We fed prostitutes, pimps, kids, mechanics, moms, grandmas, homeless guys, crack addicts, and drug dealers . . . . After 4+ hours, I was exhausted and found myself looking forward to getting home . . . .

I don't know about this. I don't think I like this type of community service. It didn't feel good. Well, it felt good to give the kids food knowing that they probably don't have food at home. But no one's life was changed. No one's situation was changed. Perhaps, our feeding program helps people to not change their situation . . . . I also feel distinctly separate from the people that come to the van. THEY come to OUR van and WE give THEM food. Then THEY go away and WE go away. We've all got a sense of US and THEM and I don't know how to even begin to go about breaking that down. Sometimes there was casual conversation between us. Sometimes there was hostile conversation. But there was never meaningful conversation . . . .

At first, I thought any changes that will take place on the south side must come from public policy . . . . There is a new [program] underway I just learned about from my public policy friend. He told me the area where the feeding program runs has been labeled an official empowerment zone. This means that millions of dollars will be poured

into the south side and community members and business owners in the community decide where it will go and what it will be used for. I was skeptical when I heard this because so many similar programs have failed, precisely because they do not attack the real issue, which I believe is racism. I'm seeing its effects first hand. And experiencing racism within myself as I try not to see each person that approaches our van as a crack addict. But, it looks to me like crack addiction on the south side is just another branch of the racism tree.

In my earlier analysis of Keith Morton's alternative model for encouraging the transformation of students in service learning classes, I suggested that students are capable of moving along several vectors in an integrative fashion rather than confined within different paradigms. Christina's reflective essay is clearly "exhibit A" for this argument. I am continually amazed by how this passage resonates within a number of moral registers:

- Cognitive, moral, emotional, and interpersonal dimensions are integrated throughout. There is a firm intellectual core to Christina's moral interrogations that includes a recognition of destructive power of dualistic thinking (cf. Colby, et al., 2003, 105).
- Clearly, Christina recognizes the moral ambiguity of a food distribution program ("no one's life was changed"), but she realizes that so-called "charity" has a positive side ("it felt good to give the kids food knowing that they probably don't have food at home"). She also recognizes that public policy solutions may leave untouched the moral core of the issue ("which I believe is racism") and, therefore, exhibit their own moral ambiguity.
- Like virtually all of my students, Christina wants, above all, to connect, to break through social barriers but she sees the very nature of social processes, which includes her own service, as rigged ("We've all got a sense of US and THEM and I don't know how to even begin to go about breaking that down").
- Most importantly, through self-criticism ("experiencing racism within myself") Christina sees the interdependency of the systemic social issue and her own core self. This sense of interdependency is articulated with the passion of one who is taking responsibility for her actions, by acknowledging and addressing the reflection of systemic injustice in the depths of her self.
- The integration of moral sensitivity, moral judgment, and moral motivation in these reflections bode well for Christina's long term development of a moral character just as they exhibit a remarkable degree of moral courage on her part.

Christina, in truth, is the moral exemplar of what I mean by moving like a starfish. From the standpoint of a teacher wanting to assist the Christinas in my classes and the students who could begin to see, judge, and act like Christina, the charity to social justice model appears to be a crude frame of reference.

As I conclude this essay, I reflect on this past week's class on liberation theology. The topic for the evening was Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In reflecting upon his service, one student expressed his frustration in working with a young man from an inner-city neighborhood who was mired in despair. As we probed more deeply, we learned that the young man was resistant to suggestions to take a minimum-wage job and that he had a remarkable musical talent. My instinctive response was to encourage the class to treat this relationship in Freirean terms as a "sign of the times," to ask how personal despair arises in a society that squanders its wealth and human lives in ill-begotten wars while leaving the talents of its young to waste. In short, like Morton, I immediately pushed towards a systemic analysis

of the interdependency of personal despair and mindless social structures and policies. Briefly, all too briefly, we touched upon the reasons we found this story so disheartening. What we could have explored more fully were the forms of moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and character called for by this concrete relationship that struck a chord in all of us. A Buddhist might suggest that reflecting on service requires of the learner a continually growing sense of mindfulness, something that Christina exemplified and I, in this situation, lacked. Simple frameworks are counterproductive. Beyond them stand students like Christina struggling with complex situations and the complexities of their own developing moral sense. To promote a perspective transformation through service learning requires that we teachers, too, transform our perspectives and develop truly complex frames of reference through which students can understand their own starfish-like development.

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