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Acting Locally in a Flat World: Global Citizenship and the Democratic Practice of Service-Learning

by Richard Battistoni, Nicholas Longo, and Harry T. Wilks

Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community. *John Dewey*

The world is being flattened. I didn't start it and you can't stop it, except at a great cost to human development and your own future. *Thomas Friedman*

This paper series seems especially significant this year, as Campus Compact celebrates an important milestone. The context has certainly changed over the decades since the founding of Campus Compact twenty years ago. For while Campus Compact has grown impressively to more than 950 member campuses with 31 state offices under the leadership of Elizabeth Hollander, there is also a sense that service-learning is at a crossroads. At least one dimension for educators to consider is the connection between the local and the global, and the importance of global citizenship and democratic practices which promote global citizenship. To be engaged and relevant requires that service-learning includes a large vision, along with democratic practices for acting locally with global intentions. The "flattened world" which Thomas Friedman has popularly termed for the rapid rise of globalization since the start of the 21st century has important implications for service-learning educators trying to implement John Dewey's vision of building democratic, neighborly communities. It requires us to ask: if democracy "begins at home," what does this mean in the context of an increasingly global society?

In this paper we examine this question through the lens of what it might mean to frame efforts in service-learning under the broader conception of "global citizenship." We examine how an explicitly local and democratic pedagogy and approach to public problem solving not only can, but must, co-exist with an increasingly globalized world. We make the following claims:

- The changing nature of globalization requires service-learning practitioners to think about the global context and global implications for local efforts;
- Working in civil society offers students the opportunity to experience the global value of interdependence, gain essential skills for public work, and help build a civic global network;
- Community-based efforts give students necessary global knowledge through the local wisdom obtained through active engagement with local communities; and
- Service-learning can help students navigate the interconnections and potential tensions between global and local cultures.

After we suggest ways to frame issues of service-learning in the context of a global society, we will conclude (in the appendix) by reporting on efforts at three universities attempting to act globally through local community engagement.

Changing Context

The roots of service-learning are grounded in the progressive tradition of education that "protested a restricted view of education," as Jane Addams argued. Perhaps the most significant contribution that service-learning has made to the academy is the importance of expanding the

boundaries of where learning occurs. This idea catalyzed a generation of faculty, staff, and students to engage in community-based work and then reflect on these experiences through the lenses of a variety of disciplines.

Service-learning, however, was never meant to be simply a technique to help students better understand a set of concepts, theories, or practices. Rather, service-learning has always tried to be a rich, democratic pedagogy that transforms students and the broader university, while solving public problems. It has always sought to embed experience in a local context of place, public institutions, and interpersonal relationships.

Since the founding of Campus Compact and the birth of the contemporary service-learning movement, we've seen the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War; the start of a new "war on terrorism;" the popularization of the Internet and a technological revolution; and a movement toward free trade and neo-liberal policies, along with counter movements against globalization that are not only reshaping the world economy, but also the social, political and cultural life of all communities.

Each of these events, for better or worse, has led to the "flattening" of the world and requires us to rethink what we mean by "education for citizenship" in a democracy. At the same time, many of our nation's finest universities continue to live side-by-side with some of the most economically depressed neighboring (not neighborly) communities. There is perhaps no more important time for colleges and universities to play a leadership role.

Today's gravest public problems, including rising inequality and expanded areas of concentrated poverty, pernicious racism, a global environmental crisis, and increasingly overburdened and marginalized public institutions, require engaged universities. For educators to respond to these problems, to be relevant to students in the increasingly competitive job market, and to attempt to give public purpose to the increasingly privatized university, education must include a global understanding and critique. In short, service-learning practitioners must be global citizens.

Contributing to a Global Civil Society

One way to frame global citizenship efforts connected to service-learning is through the lens of "civil society." In recent years political and social theorists have examined the importance of a robust civil society to democracy (e.g., Barber, 2003, 1998; Havel, 1992). For these theorists, democratic citizenship outcomes are not to be sought in the increasingly bureaucratized and privatized arenas of government or the private sector, but rather, in the mediating institutions of civil society.

When service-learning is seen as a democratic practice, it offers students the opportunity to work with a diverse group of fellow citizens in these local institutions. By connecting them to a variety of voluntary associations, colleges and universities connect students to a global movement to strengthen civil society; and give them experiences with this powerful alternative to both big government and large corporations.

Through working in after-school programs, public libraries, health clinics, locally-owned businesses, churches, synagogues, mosques, or other grassroots organizations, students experience the civic values of interdependence. At the same time, they build civic confidence and a civic identity as they gain essential skills for public work and democratic social change. Finally,

students building a robust civil society through their common local actions actually play an important part in the international network connecting the local with the global.

Global Knowledge from Local Wisdom

Another way that service-learning can lend itself to conceptions of global citizenship is in its capacity to deepen "global knowledge," by deepening students' understandings of global issues through the lessons of local wisdom. There is a rich discussion in the recent literature of higher education of what our students need to know about world affairs, and what kind of curriculum will achieve these critical global objectives (e.g., Bok, 2006).

While there is much that students can learn about global trends and issues through direct instruction, supervised research, and global simulations, service-learning provides a kind of "local wisdom" to supplement this "global knowledge." What service-learning offers is to move students beyond disinterested knowers of global economics and institutions or disembodied theorists of international human rights. By connecting them to the civic spaces of local communities of which their campus is a part, students can come to a deeper appreciation of the impact of global forces on domestic society.¹

As we show in the appendix, students working with new immigrants, for example, are able to deepen their understanding of the global issues of migration and international market forces through relationships formed in community-based service projects. Likewise, the impact of the changing economy and job loss on manufacturing towns can be understood through collaborative work in American communities, along with relationships with people from countries where cheap labor is being exported.

Conclusion: Navigating Local and Global Culture Clashes

The rise of the global, of course, raises serious issues about the loss of the local. You see the potential for tension between these trends playing out in every aspect of our world, from where we work, to how we spend our time, to the ways in which we solve public problems. Students involved in service work in their local communities are sure to encounter libraries struggling to refine their missions in an age of Google, local businesses struggling with Wal-Mart and other big box stores, and contingent communities in transition socially, culturally, and economically because of globalization. They are also likely to experience conflicts between the preservation of local culture and values and the implementation of universal principles through international organizations. In recent years we have seen clashes, for example, between traditional local cultures and the promotion of international women's rights, between families attempting to instill traditional child raising values and international conventions on the rights of the child.

We believe that service-learning offers an avenue not only to understand these competing forces, but also to help revitalize local culture with an understanding and respect for the global. Students can come to appreciate and yet critically examine local practices in light of global principles like those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And service-learning, done well, can move students beyond the potential acquiescence that often accompanies passively acquired knowledge of global problems, to an informed activism that comes from the development of local relationships informed by global contexts. In the appendix that follows, we offer examples of three different campuses that are attempting to creatively connect the local with the global through community-based civic engagement. These are obviously not the only examples of good

practice in this area (we are beginning to document others as well), but they will give you concrete illustrations of what is possible at different institutions.

Appendix: Innovative Academically-Based Campus Models

Macalester College: A New Institute for Global Citizenship

"Global citizenship begins at home" is the mantra of Macalester College's recently launched Institute for Global Citizenship. The Institute, which is the flagship initiative of new president Brian Rosenberg, attempts "to forge the college's work on internationalism, multiculturalism, and service into a more compelling, integrated, and intellectually powerful whole" by combining Macalester's International Center with the Community Service Office.

While the international studies program and community service programs were both nationally recognized, explains Andrew Lathom, associate dean of the Institute and professor of political science, "they never talked to each other."

The Institute has sponsored a high-profile speaker series that includes U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman. Aside from attempts to bring visibility to the concept of global citizenship, which also includes advertising on Minnesota Public Radio, the Institute is focusing on its urban location through place-based community-based learning. Macalester students learn about globalization through the lens of two Twin Cities neighborhoods with large immigrant populations: Lake Street in Minneapolis and the West Side of St. Paul.

Providence College: Partnering Public Service with Global Studies

In 1994 with a \$5 million gift from a local philanthropist, Providence College's Feinstein Institute for Public Service created the first interdisciplinary major and minor in public and community service in the country. The course sequence for majors and minors, which includes the study of service, community, diversity, democracy, along with organizations, history, and ethics, has historically made attempts to include an international perspective. The interest in global citizenship was especially emphasized by students who organized international service trips and then requested special topics courses to analyze and reflect on their international experiences.

Connecting the local with the global became a more central feature of the Feinstein Institute with the development of a new major in global studies in the fall of 2005, which "stresses an active learning approach" to develop "a global understanding of social, economic, and political issues." Substantial partnerships between the Feinstein Institute and global studies program have developed enabling public service students to develop a broader global perspective, while global studies students engage in the local community. The strong relationships with the local community and expertise at campus-community partnerships the Feinstein Institute has developed over the past decade has been especially valuable for the collaboration.

Students in the Introduction to Global Studies, for example, learn about issues of globalization and are encouraged to develop their own philosophy of global citizenship. Many do their community service work at English for Action, a local not-for-profit organization, using popular education to educate new immigrants from Latin America. Their work at English for Action allows students to deepen their understanding of the issue of immigration in the context of a global labor market, by giving them the "local wisdom" that comes from developing relationships

with recent immigrants. Students' written reflections on their experiences at English for Action have stressed the richness and diversity of the countries from which their immigrant families come, the opportunities and challenges they face in the United States, their struggles with learning a new language, separation from family, and the discrimination they face in their daily lives. In all of this, students are mentored by upper-level public service students who serve as "community assistants" at the global studies students' community service sites.

Moreover, this fall the Introduction to Global Studies course is being co-taught by a local community partner, a pioneering teaching model of faculty and community partners co-teaching together initiated by the Feinstein Institute. Finally, students from both majors are working with staff and faculty to organize international service-learning trips with follow-up courses on campus.

Miami University: Acting Locally, Civic Learning, and Civic Leadership in Southwestern Ohio

Aware that communities across Ohio are struggling to adapt and respond to local manifestations of globalization, Miami University has developed a multi-year community-based research and learning project that explores the intersections between globalization and local transformation called Acting Locally: Civic Learning and Civic Leadership in Southwestern Ohio.

Housed in the department of American Studies, Acting Locally was launched in the fall of 2006 in collaboration with the Wilks Leadership Institute. A cohort of almost 30 students is taking 4 interdisciplinary, team-taught courses that each connect learning and leadership in the local community, along with an intensive summer research and action workshop.

The project partners with three communities in Southwest Ohio — the Over-the Rhine neighborhood in downtown Cincinnati, the city of Hamilton, and rural Butler county — to examine the impact of globalization on a decaying urban center, an expanding post-industrial metropolitan area, and a rural agricultural community.

¹ In Northern Ireland, the recently approved curriculum for youth civic education is titled "Local and Global Citizenship." The new initiative seeks to combine understanding of local culture, history, and civic institutions with knowledge of global institutions, such as international conventions on human rights.