



# From Teaching Democratic Thinking to Developing Democratic Civic Identity

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**Using theory and research from the cognitive and social sciences as well as the literature of service-learning and community-campus engagement, we critically examine an over-emphasis on democratic thinking as the primary construct of interest in American higher education's efforts to prepare young people for meaningful participation in democracy. We propose developing democratic civic identity as a more appropriate superordinate goal than teaching democratic thinking. We examine relationships between and among cognition, behavior, and attitudes generally and within the context of democratically-engaged community-campus partnerships and democratic critical reflection as a basis for developing and refining persons as civic agents in a diverse democracy. We conclude with implications of the analysis for service-learning—a pedagogy that, when designed and implemented accordingly, provides a uniquely powerful means to cultivate democratic civic identity.**

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The goal that higher education should prepare students for active participation in a democratic society has waxed and waned over the centuries of American higher education but has lingered in mission statements, recruitment publicity, commencement speeches, and other expressions of institutional identity and purpose (Hartman, 2013). The volume and passion of such pronouncements, their persistence, and their influence on campus policy and practice have varied not only across the decades but also across institution types, disciplines, and professions. Appraisals of community-campus engagement suggest that implementation has fallen short of transforming the culture and practices of higher education to be demonstratively more democratic (Hartman, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). This is not to say that civic engagement has had no impact on higher education. Highlighting such examples as expansion of service-learning, assessment, faculty rewards structures, and community partnerships, Bringle (2013) notes, "Many of the criticisms that change has been slow, small,

incomplete, or otherwise fallen short of ideals under-acknowledge and perhaps under-value the significant changes that have occurred” (p. x). Regardless of the metric used to gauge the degree to which higher education at the macro-level (culture, policies) or at the micro-level (courses, projects, partnerships) is democratic, there is room for—and aspiration for—improvement (Hartman, 2013). As the academy enters a fourth decade of calls to take seriously the civic education of students (Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Fitzgerald, Burack, & Seifer, 2010a, 2010b; Langseth & Plater, 2004; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011; Sigmon, 1979; Stanton, 1990; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999), recent activities warrant special note for their breadth of participation and depth of influence (e.g., Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009).

The paradigm of democratic civic engagement (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009) has emerged as a powerful articulation of the reciprocal (i.e., co-created, as distinct from mutually beneficial), asset-based, multi-directional orientation to community-campus engagement that may be not only an aspiration but, in fact, a necessity if the “general crisis of democracy” (Boyte in Saltmarsh et al., p. 8) is to be subverted. In explicit contrast with the uni-lateral, campus-to-community, and faculty-to-student flow of knowledge and expertise that characterizes the dominant, technocratic orientation to community-campus engagement, democratic civic engagement “seeks the public good *with* the public and not merely *for* the public as a means to facilitating a more active and engaged democracy” (Saltmarsh et al., p. 9). Democratic engagement encompasses, nurtures, and enacts “inclusiveness, participation, task sharing, ... reciprocity in public problem solving, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building” (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 6). Hartman (2013) identifies an additional set of democratic values: affiliation with others, belief in moral equality, and support for social rights. When we use “democratic” as a modifier, we are referring to both of these sets of attributes and values.

There are many pedagogical methods in use across higher education to foster student learning outcomes in the general category of “democratic” (several of which are discussed throughout this issue): democratic dialogue, democratic classroom designs, policy debates, attending governing activities such as council meetings and public hearings, participating in civic or political events, and critical reading of historic texts and contemporary media coverage are a few examples. We contend that a particularly powerful approach is service-learning that involves the integration of affect (feeling), behavior (action), and cognition (thinking) in the context of democratically-engaged partnerships focused on the public good and democratic critical reflection focused, at least in part, on civic learning—in other words, service-learning that is designed to achieve democratic purposes through democratic processes. Although each of these components can occur in the classroom, students engaging with community members and faculty/staff in service-learning can be the exemplar of such an integrated approach, if designed accordingly. We define service-learning as “the integration of academic material, relevant service activities, and critical reflection in a reciprocal partnership that engages students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal

[growth] learning objectives as well as to advance public purposes” (Bringle & Clayton, 2012, p. 105).

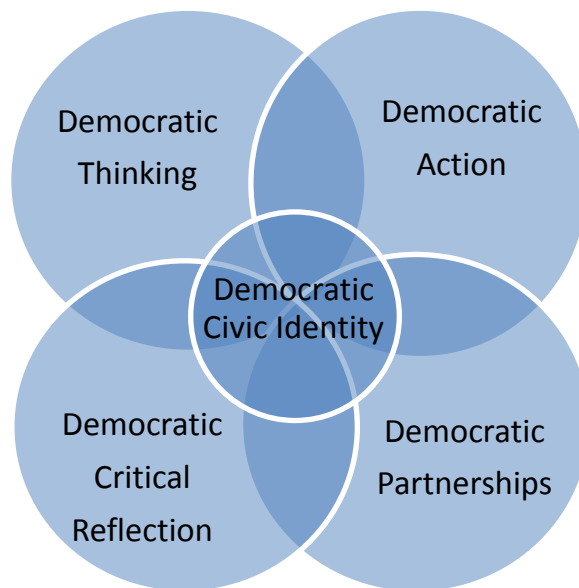
Service-learning has emerged as not only a high impact experiential pedagogy but also a vehicle for cultivating citizenship and change agency because of its capacity to involve participants in community-engaged activities that promote civic learning (i.e., civic knowledge, civic skills, civic dispositions) and also enrich academic learning. Meta-analyses of research that has compared service-learning to other pedagogies have found that service-learning has an advantage as a means of generating civic outcomes (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Although the early pioneers of the service-learning movement advocated for inclusive participation and a heavily democratic orientation to the values, relationships, activities, processes, and outcomes of the pedagogy (Stanton et al., 1999), contemporary critiques suggest that both the understanding and the implementation of the pedagogy have failed to embody the core values central to democratic practice (Battistoni, 1997; Hartman, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Service-learning designed and undertaken as democratic civic engagement encompasses democratic purposes (e.g., justice, equity) and democratic processes (i.e., inclusive, participatory, reciprocal). Our primary goal is to explore what is required for service-learning to fulfill its potential for producing democratic citizens.

Our starting point is to problematize “democratic thinking” as the desired learning outcome through examination of theory and research that highlight the insufficiency of “thinking” that is not understood to be deeply intertwined with action and attitudes and, in turn, of action that is not examined through critical reflection and does not occur in the context of partnerships (Figure 1). We explore the significance of and relationships among *thinking*, *action*, *attitudes*, *reflection*, and *partnerships* at a general level and in terms of the explicitly democratic forms each can take. Our analysis is grounded in the convictions that citizens with identities as democratic—as distinct from technocratic—agents are what is needed if democracy is to flourish and that such citizenship is not solely a matter of thinking about democracy (i.e., gaining knowledge of democracy) or thinking in democratic ways (i.e., reasoning in ways that are grounded in democratic values). We conclude with implications of this analysis for the design and implementation of service-learning courses.

For the purposes of this discussion, *thinking* encompasses the cognitive domain (e.g., beliefs, thoughts, schemas, heuristics, memory, problem solving, decisions, understanding). *Action* (e.g., behavior) can include any act or activity, but we generally focus on community-engaged activities undertaken by individuals or groups in service-learning courses (e.g., direct or indirect community service, advocacy, research, producing public works). *Attitudes* are favorable or unfavorable affective states toward an object, issue, or person. *Reflection*, referring here to critical reflection, is the process of examining experience through various analytical lenses in order to generate, deepen, and document learning and to improve the quality of thinking, action, and relationships (Ash & Clayton, 2009a). *Partnerships*, which can be interpersonal (Bringle & Clayton, 2013) or inter-organizational (Janke, 2013), are a subset of relationships between any of a variety of constituencies (e.g., students, staff of community organizations,

faculty, administrators, and community residents) that possess closeness, equity, and fairness (Clayton, Bringle, Senior, Huq, & Morrison, 2010). Too often service-learning—which integrates thinking, action, attitudes, reflection, and partnerships—falls short of its democratic potential. Even when students are learning and thinking about democracy in the classroom and engaged in active service in communities, if they are not involved in democratically engaged partnerships “that are critical for transmission of democratic practices” (Dostilio, 2012, p. 5) and are not guided in critical reflection that is democratic in both content and process, then courses may well fail to embody the core values so central to democratic practice (Battistoni, 1997; Hartman, 2013; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011) and, in turn, fail to cultivate citizens with a democratic civic identity.

Figure 1. Components of Developing Democratic Civic Identity



## Beyond Teaching Democratic Thinking

In “Teaching Thinking,” which framed the 2009 – 2011 Research Seminar on Teaching Democratic Thinking hosted by Elon University, Minnich (2003) asserts that “thinking ... has effects, not products” (p. 6); this claim is preceded by statements that emphasize the process of thinking rather than its outcomes (i.e., conclusions, decisions, intentions). One of the themes running through the discussion in the Elon seminar concerned the purposes and implications of a focus on thinking as a process to be understood, cultivated, and investigated in the context of democracy—with the risk that thinking is viewed as an end in itself and in some ways distinct from actions or outcomes. Specifically, participants considered at length the presumed and intended relationships between democratic thinking and democratic action, a line of inquiry echoed when Minnich (2012) later posed the question, “How is action

intrinsically significant for all learning?" (p. x). Our analysis provides a partial answer to this question.

Higher education privileges learning in the cognitive domain, with less emphasis on the behavioral, personal, aesthetic, physical, and affective domains (Nussbaum, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This emphasis is particularly apparent in the liberal arts and humanities (in contrast with professional education and applied fields). Among the most important contributions experiential learning in general and service-learning in particular make to higher education are their expansion of the domain of learning goals beyond the cognitive and their insistence that interactions in and with diverse communities and critical reflection on experiences can deepen learning across the full range of desired outcomes (cognitive and others). Service-learning, in addition, highlights the pervasiveness and significance of civic learning opportunities, which include but transcend cognitively-based understanding.

In this section we review theory and research from cognitive and social sciences that examine the interrelationships between and among attitudes, cognition, and behavior to support the position that an emphasis solely on cognition as a superordinate educational goal is deficient.

### **Brain and Action**

Action and interpersonal interaction provide the brain with feedback, which is necessary to re-evaluate a changing environment and to predict outcomes of actions on the environment (Wolpert, Doya, & Kawato, 2003). The cycle of action and feedback provides information that enhances predictions about future events that "may ... be fundamental for high level cognitive functions including action observation and understanding, mental practice, imitation, and social cognition" (Wolpert & Flanagan, 2001, p. R732).

Action also provides feedback on knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Knowledge and skills that are learned but never applied to or refined through action are often presumed to be efficacious; but that confidence may be unsubstantiated and, therefore, exaggerated. Across many domains of competence, individuals tend to have a bias that they will perform better on tasks than they in fact do, with the result that judgments of cognitive learning, when untested through action, are consistently unreliable and overconfident (Metcalfe, 1998). This may be particularly relevant to classroom-based learning when it is acquired in isolation and divorced from concrete experiences (i.e., actions, interpersonal interactions) that provide opportunities for testing ideas, thoughts, concepts, and principles.

The literature on response-shift bias provides evidence for this bias by illustrating the importance of action and feedback to cognitive development and the ways in which behavior and experience can correct cognitive bias. Response-shift bias occurs when retrospective pre-tests (in which learners are asked, at the end of an educational intervention, to indicate what they now understand their pre-intervention levels of knowledge, skill, or competency to have been) reveal inflated pre-test self-evaluations (i.e., over-estimations). The experience of the intervention changes participants' frame of reference for self-evaluation, giving them a more

accurate (less exaggerated) sense of their initial levels than they had before the experience (Howard & Dailey, 1979; Jameson, Clayton, Jaeger, & Bringle, 2012). Thus, engaging in action is one mechanism that provides feedback on cognitive systems that are integral to self-awareness, understanding, and subsequent activities and development.

Research establishes that action makes unique contributions in the development of perceptual and cognitive schemas that produce goal-directed behaviors, which subsequently inform cognitive processes and establish a basis for developing predictive models for oneself and for interacting with others (Aglioti, Cesari, Romani, & Urgesi, 2008; Urgesi, Savonitto, Fabbro, & Aglioti, 2011). These skills are important for establishing and maintaining relationships as well as for developing and refining cognitive outcomes. Urgesi et al. (2011) demonstrate that assigning novices to practice conditions improved their ability to predict the behavior of others relative to individuals placed in an observation-only training condition.

Thus, action-based experiences uniquely improve cognitive skills in ways that can be applied in subsequent situations and in ways that may not be possible through didactic and other forms of non-experiential teaching and learning. In the case of service-learning, engaging with community members (e.g., interacting with diverse others, participating in unfamiliar activities) is an action-based learning process that involves higher order decision making skills and that, therefore, complements classroom learning in qualitatively distinctive ways that are advantageous for cognitive development and subsequent behavior (Eyler & Giles, 1999) .

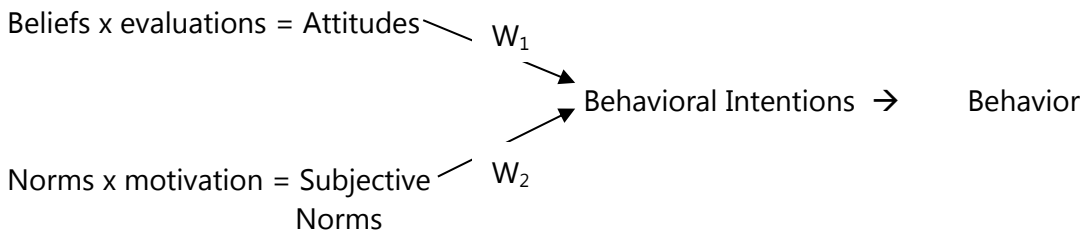
### ***Cognition, Affect, and Behavior***

Teaching democratic thinking as the sole or primary aim of education either for its own sake or because of the assumption that it will inherently, necessarily, and eventually result in appropriate or intended behaviors (e.g., democratic actions) is, at best, suspect. Social psychological research (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) has demonstrated that the relationship between thinking (e.g., beliefs) and subsequent action is complex and sometimes precarious. As one example, individuals over-predict the likelihood (i.e., a belief) that they will engage in generous, kind, and ethical acts (Dunning, 2006). Whether an analogous inaccuracy occurs for democratic thinking leading to democratic action is not clear but would be consistent with the findings of the more general research. Although traditionally, affect (emotion, attitude), behavior (action), and cognition (thought) have been viewed as distinct areas of psychological functioning, each of these can be interrelated with the others in ways that have important implications for understanding and engaging students in community-based pedagogies. Therefore, we examine the relationships between and among these three domains.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010 for an update) provides a basis for understanding relationships between and among cognitions, attitudes, behaviors, and behavioral intentions. Behavioral intention is an intervening variable in their theory that summarizes one's belief in the likelihood one will engage in an action. Illustrated here with a common challenge (and opportunity) facing

service-learning instructors—that of surfacing and problematizing stereotypes (beliefs), prejudices (attitudes), and discrimination (behavior)—the theory postulates that a set of beliefs (e.g., “Homeless people are lazy”) is combined with corresponding evaluations (e.g., “Lazy is unpleasant”) for each of the beliefs to form an overall attitude (e.g., “I have an unfavorable feeling about homeless people”). An individual’s intention to engage in a behavior (e.g., either interact with or avoid individuals experiencing homelessness) is determined by two factors: (a) the person’s attitude toward the behavior; and, (b) the norms associated with that behavior (e.g., what significant others expect the individual to do with regard to homeless persons). Each of these determinants can be differentially weighted (Figure 2). That is, in some cases, attitudes may be the predominant determinant of behavioral intentions; in other cases, normative influences may be more influential. Behavioral intentions are predictors of behaviors to the extent that an individual can and does act on the intention to perform the behavior (e.g., whether the individual has or creates an opportunity to interact with individuals experiencing homelessness). The theory makes explicit the potential connections between cognitions (beliefs) and behavior(s) as well as the ways in which other factors (such as social norms) can support and/or interfere with the connection between particular beliefs and particular behaviors.

Figure 2. Theory of Reasoned Action (adapted from Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).



### **Affect and Cognition**

For the purpose of this discussion, attitude is construed to be a unidimensional evaluative (i.e., affective) variable (e.g., how “favorably” or “unfavorably” someone feels about an object, action, or person). Related affective states include the basic emotions (e.g., sadness, fear, happiness, surprise) and moods (e.g., empathy, compassion), which can be important determinants of attitudes and actions in general as well as democratic attitudes and democratic actions in particular. For example, empathy has been identified as an important situation-specific emotional state that predicts helping (Batson & Ahmed, 2009) and, therefore, can potentially be related to democratic approaches to community engagement. For the sake of simplicity, we will examine only the relationship between an attitude and behavior, noting that the definition of attitude includes affect (i.e., various emotions and feelings). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, what individuals think and how they feel about those beliefs provide a basis for how they feel (i.e., attitudes, moods, emotions) generally and how they feel

about engaging in a particular behavior (e.g., voting for candidate X, giving money to a charity, being inclusive, using democratic skills in community work). Similarly, if information (e.g., a persuasive message, educational materials) changes the way individuals think or what they believe, then presumably it may change the way they feel and, possibly, the way they act subsequently. Much education is based on the premise that students' attitudes toward an issue (e.g., democracy, homelessness, disability, poverty, climate change) will be shaped by information communicated through courses and that their attitudes will be altered accordingly (e.g., they will become less bigoted or more empathic). However, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, changes in attitude may or may not result in behavioral change.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Aronson, 1992) posits an alternative relationship between affect and cognition by suggesting that the former can influence the latter. Pre-existing attitudes, emotions, and moods can influence how individuals interpret new information (e.g., in a course, in a new community setting). This creates the possibility that information from new sources or new settings will be perceived in biased ways or processed in ways that are consistent with existing attitudes—running the risk of reinforcing existing stereotypes. Similarly, altering attitudes or moods prior to entering new situations (e.g., community settings) can influence how individuals interpret information subsequently encountered there. This provides a basis for designing pre-experience reflection, orientation sessions, and other forms of preparation that can assist students in becoming aware of and adjusting attitudes prior to entering a community service setting.

### ***Affect and Behavior***

Individuals are presumed to behave in ways that are consistent with their feelings and attitudes. However, the Theory of Reasoned Action specifies that there can be other determinants of behavior (i.e., normative influences, obstacles to action) in addition to affect. Research (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2007) demonstrates that attitudes guide behavior under particular conditions, which include when they are very specific (e.g., attitudes toward the action vs. very general attitudes), stable, consistent, accessible, and ***based on direct experience***, and when situational constraints and social norms are relatively weak. Thus, if the attitude is based on first-hand or direct experience (e.g., encounters with an issue through service-learning activities in communities), it is more likely to guide subsequent behavior than if it is based on second-hand or indirect experience (e.g., only classroom-based discussion of an issue). Furthermore, if an attitude is changed through direct experience (e.g., interactions with community members in a service-learning course) and the aforementioned conditions exist (i.e., specific attitudes toward the action, stable, consistent, accessible, weak situational constraints and social norms), then changes in the attitude can be expected to result in behavioral change (e.g., persistent community engagement, generous acts toward homeless people, use of democratic skills) to a greater extent than if the attitude is not based on direct behavioral experience. However, consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action, it may also be the case that a changed attitude does not result in a behavioral change when the other conditions are not present because the attitude may not be the dominant system that is guiding the behavior (e.g., norms are more important; there is no opportunity to act in a



manner consistent with the attitude). Thus, simply changing cognitions (e.g., thoughts about democracy) or attitudes (e.g., feelings toward democratic ideals) in the classroom may not result in subsequent democratic behaviors (e.g., just, inclusive, participatory, reciprocal, equitable) that are consistent with those attitudes or cognitions.

An alternative model to attitudes influencing behavior is that it is possible for behavior change to produce attitudinal change. That is, if individuals can be induced to behave in different, uncharacteristic (counter-attitudinal) ways, typically under conditions of low situational pressure and in situations when they feel as though they have exercised choice, then they may change their attitude to be consistent with their behavior (Aronson, 1992). This scenario is particularly relevant to service-learning because this is what may be happening for some subsets of students who have neutral or contrary attitudes toward community service in general or toward a particular population (e.g., disabled, elderly, youth, homeless) with whom they will be engaged during the service activities. Students who are induced to behave in positive, prosocial, democratic ways towards those individuals and form positive relationships during their community activities may develop more favorable attitude toward those individuals. Brown (2013) found that students who provided direct services were more likely to develop a social justice orientation to community involvement than students who were involved in indirect service in the community (e.g., to a community-based agency). Furthermore, when the attitude is changed through direct experience (e.g., service-learning experience) and other conditions exist (e.g., normative support, sense of control, efficacy), it is even more likely that the attitude will predict subsequent prosocial behavior (e.g., future collaboration with community members, democratic behavior). This would be in contrast to the case in which similar attitude change occurs within a classroom but without direct experience. In this case, research (Baron et al., 2007) suggests that the resulting attitude will be less likely to predict subsequent behavior that is consistent with the attitude.

### **Behavior and Cognition**

As previously mentioned, the relationship between thought and action is empirically precarious. The Theory of Reasoned Action provides a basis upon which to understand why a belief or set of beliefs might or might not be a good predictor of a particular behavior or pattern of behaviors. Individuals have unreliable, overly optimistic, and inaccurate estimates of their behaviors, indicating a discontinuity between their cognitions and their actions. As explained by Dunning (2006):

People overestimate the odds that they will buy a flower for charity, vote for President, maintain a successful romantic relationship, volunteer for an unpleasant lab experiment so that a 10-year-old girl will not have to, and cooperate with another person when money is at stake. (p. 601)

Dunning notes that these inaccuracies are not necessarily intentional and that they may occur even when individuals are motivated to provide accurate assessments of self-knowledge and predictions of behavior. He also notes that they may be particularly acute for individuals who

lack good self-knowledge and, therefore, have poor self-awareness of knowledge and competencies (e.g., students who are developing skills; students in unfamiliar community settings; novices in a particular practice area). One of Dunning's recommendations for correcting the discrepancy is through the development of relationships with others who can provide accurate feedback. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of having students in community settings that involve them in partnerships with peers and community members who can provide feedback on skills (e.g., communication skills, democratic skills) to improve accuracy and efficacy.

## Democratic Civic Identity

One of the risks of isolated intellectualized learning is that it results in enclaved knowledge that is separate from the individual's identity rather than personally internalized. This can too easily occur when academic content is presented only in traditional classroom settings, when pedagogical processes emphasize only cognitive learning, and when learning is understood to be or is distinct from and independent of behavior and affect. When students enter into intentionally-designed experiences that integrate course content with community-engaged activities, they are more likely to be not only intellectually but also personally and interpersonally involved with the content and the community issues as well as with other individuals, groups, and organizations. Under these conditions, the experiences are more likely to be integrated with the student's identity.

*There are many and varied perspectives on the nature of identity (Owens, Robinson, Smith-Lovin, 2010), but it can be viewed as:*

... the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves. It is based on our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are, based on how others act toward us, our wishes and desires, and our evaluations of ourselves. (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 130).

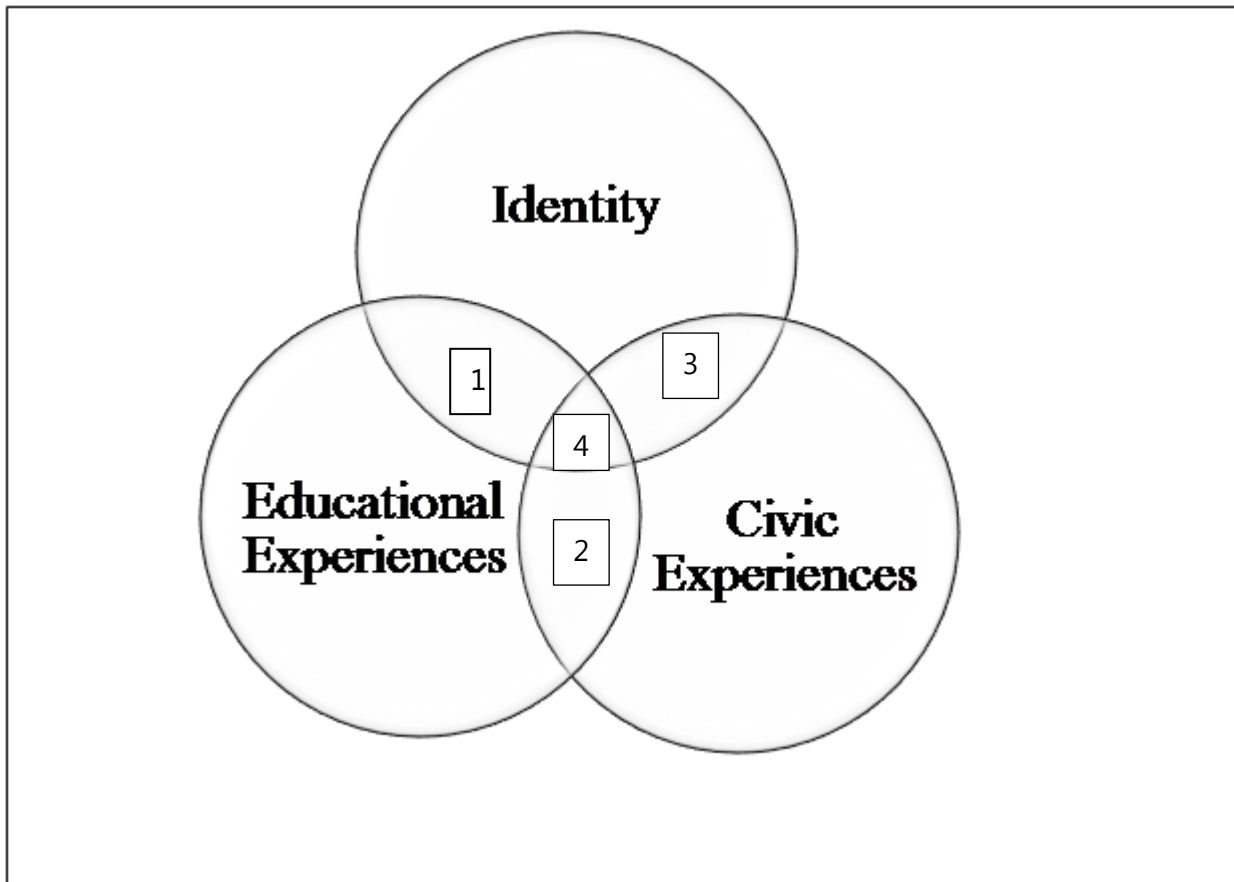
One of the common themes that emerges from related theory and research is that identity is not fixed and stable but rather socially constructed through action, including action in the civic realm, which is especially significant for our purposes here (Mitchell, Battistoni, Keene, & Reiff, 2013; Yates & Youniss, 2006). Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1997), for example, conclude that "participation in organizations and movements provides experience with normative civic practices and ideologies, and shapes youth's emerging identities in a long-lasting form" (p. 629). Here we review some ways for conceptualizing democratic civic identity.

Knefelkamp (2008) describes civic identity resulting from the integration of (a) engagement with others; (b) complex intellectual (i.e., cognitive) and ethical development; (c) holistic practice (including empathy for others); and (d) multiple experiences and opportunities for learning, experimentation, and active reflection. Boyte (2009) speaks of having a civic identity as "seeing [ourselves] as the builders of democratic society" rather than looking to experts for

solutions. He links such an identity with civic agency, or “the capacities to work with others who [are] different in environments of uncertainty,” and he points to collaborative action “out of practical interest to build common things” as the seedbed for developing civic identity and agency. Palmer (2011) posits five “habits of the heart” that “are crucial to sustaining a democracy”: “an understanding that we are all in this together, an appreciation of the value of ‘otherness,’ an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways, a sense of personal voice and agency, and a capacity to create community” (pp. 44-45). These habits are “deeply ingrained ways of seeing, being, and responding to life that involve our minds, our emotions, our self-images, our concepts of meaning and purpose in life” (p. 44)—evoking much that is encompassed in our thinking about democratic civic identity. Rather than merely teaching democratic thinking, then, community-engaged pedagogies such as service-learning may well be best used when their explicit goal is the cultivation of democratic civic identity.

Civic-mindedness as a desired student outcome has been presented as the integration of the self with educational and civic domains, which can be achieved through interpersonal relationships and critical reflection on action in the context of community-campus engagement (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011; Wall, Hedgepath, & Bringle, 2013). The conceptual framework of the Civic-Minded Graduate (Figure 3) not only illustrates the integration of civic and academic domains with identity but also makes clear the relative incompleteness of any single domain or any combination of only two domains.

FIGURE 3: Civic-Minded Graduate Model (adapted from Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011)



Area #2 of the Venn diagram, for example, represents a student who has intellectual understanding of the civic nature of academic content but lacks a sense of personal investment or relevance (e.g., to career aspirations, political interests, co-curricular activities, future civic involvement, interest in social or civic affairs); the student's identity is neither informed by nor integrated with the educational and civic domains. The triple intersection in the Venn diagram (area #4), in contrast, fully integrates educational and civic domains with the students' identity, thus representing Civic-Minded Graduates who are personally invested in educational and civic realms as providing meaning and purpose in their current and future life (Wall et al., 2013). According to Steinberg et al. (2011), "These civic-minded students are motivated to learn because they know that the knowledge and skills they acquire can equip them to make a difference in society" (p. 21). Although the framing of the Civic-Minded Graduate does not specifically focus on democracy as a content area, it does encompass civic knowledge related to social issues and volunteer opportunities, skills related to listening to divergent points of view and building consensus, values and dispositions of social responsibility, and collaboration with others.

## Democratic Partnerships and Democratic Critical Reflection

Our analysis has stressed the importance of coupling thinking with both action and affect (attitudes), and, consequently, has posited democratic civic identity as a more complete outcome than democratic thinking. Student engagement with community members for democratic purposes and through democratic processes (e.g., democratically-engaged partnerships and democratic critical reflection) is, we contend, key to developing democratic civic identity. John Dewey's work, in conjunction with theory and research from cognitive and social sciences, provides a basis for appreciating why and understanding how service-learning can be a powerful pedagogy for integrating attitudes, behavior, and cognition in the context of democratic partnerships and democratic critical reflection and thereby can help to cultivate democratic civic identity.

### *Democratically Engaged Partnerships*

Dewey (1916) makes clear that building democratic capacities is contingent on face-to-face interactions in the public sphere, stating that "society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships" (p. 99). Action is necessary but not sufficient for the development of democratic civic identity; action must bring learners into association with others in interactions and collaborations that have democratic qualities (i.e., inclusive, just, participatory, reciprocal, equitable).

The Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) provides a basis for understanding why interactions and relationships in communities can contribute to attitudinal changes that may, in turn, lead to democratic identities and subsequent patterns of democratic behavior. According to this theory, positive attitude change is most likely to occur when student interactions with individuals who are different from them have the following characteristics: (a) equal status of groups, (b) common goals, (c) contradiction of stereotypes, (d) long-term contact, and (e) norms against prejudice. This theory and the research that supports it (e.g., Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) suggest that it is the nature of the interactions that can result in the favorable change in attitudes. Erickson and O'Connor (2000) analyzed how service-learning courses can either contain these attributes that would work toward favorable outcomes based on the relationships students form with community members, or lack these attributes and reinforce unfavorable stereotypes. Well-structured service-learning courses that have democratic processes and democratic partnerships are most likely to have these attributes and result in positive outcomes (i.e., democratic thinking; democratic attitudes), particularly when they are supported with appropriate critical reflection.

Speaking of public work rather than service-learning per se, Boyte (2014) contends that democratic processes entail persons who disagree working together to get things done. When community engagement encompasses deliberation, civic agency, collaboration, and civic partnerships, then networks of trusting individuals are formed that provide the basis for community vitality, resiliency, and public work. Levine (2013) concludes that students simply being involved in community service activities is insufficient for the development of civic

learning; they must also be involved in collaborative relationships that involve deliberation in the civic realm. As he points out, this transcends mere community service (action), and, as we point out, the outcomes transcend merely learning about democracy or learning to think in ways that incorporate the values of democracy. Partnerships between students and community members that contain democratic qualities are structured in particular ways and contain particular attributes and processes (e.g., just, inclusive, participatory, equitable, reciprocal) that are critical and necessary to allowing these civic lessons to be fully developed and cognitive learning to be clarified.

Hartman (2013) goes further by contending that collaboration and deliberation are not enough. He argues that higher education has been too timid as a democratic institution, too apolitical in its approach to involving students in social issues, and much too shy in promoting the core values of democracy: affiliation with others, belief in moral equality, and support for social rights. Only when higher education critically evaluates competing values and deeply commits to these core democratic values, which it has lost, will it be positioned to teach democratic thinking, democratic skills, and democratic habits that are meaningful and enduring.

This analysis suggests that no amount of learning and thinking about democracy and no amount of activity (e.g., community service) in communities will result in the development of democratic civic identity without democratic partnerships, or democratically-engaged partnerships, to draw upon Dostilio's (2012) term. Her analysis, based on Bandura's (1986) theory of reciprocal determinism, highlights three factors that support the acquisition of democratic roles and processes in partnerships: (a) learning, modeling, and empowerment among stakeholders; (b) individuals' partnership competencies; and (c) social, political, and organizational conditions. Her research found (a) that developing a partnership orientation of inclusion, deliberation, and transparency was important to having a democratically-engaged partnership; and (b) that having partnership leadership (either an individual or a collaborative) that promoted democratically-engaged partnerships was important to maintaining democratic processes, particularly for new members.

### ***Democratic Critical Reflection***

Dewey emphasizes the importance of critical reflection on action in the development of thinking. His perspective is consistent with our position that action is a necessary ingredient for significant cognitive learning to occur:

An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory. It tends to become a mere verbal formula, a set of catchwords used to render thinking. (1916, p. 144, emphasis added).

Dewey also acknowledges that experience by itself does not necessarily produce learning; he views critical reflection as a necessary catalyst for significant learning to occur, defining it as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1910, p. 6). He values the perplexity that experience brings to the learning process and its role in critical reflection: “Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a forked-road situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives. . . . Demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection” (1933, p. 14).

One way of explaining how students make decisions and process information in community settings when faced with such perplexity is the Dual Process Theory (Kahneman, 2011). Dual Process Theory identifies two distinct cognitive systems—System 1 and System 2—both of which are relevant for understanding how learners engage in experiences, process information, and relate to those experiences subsequently. System 1 processes are descriptive, automatic, non-analytic, and shaped by prior learning; they are, therefore, relatively quick and effortless, and they are predisposed toward confirmation of what is already known or believed and toward simplistic rather than complex explanations. System 2 is analytical, requires more mental effort, “compare[s] objects on several attributes, and make[s] deliberate choices between options” (p. 36). System 2 processes are initiated when learners are challenged to question and analyze action-based experiences, including to investigate what may be Systems 1’s overly simplistic explanations and biases. In other words, System 2 involves the sort of critical reflection on experience of which Dewey spoke; it is the *educational* part of engaging students in educationally-meaningful service activities.

Practitioner-scholars have dedicated much attention to and conducted much research on the meaning and role of critical reflection in service-learning in order to determine promising practices for designing, implementing, and assessing it effectively. As noted above, collaborating with community members frequently puts students in contact with people or organizations unfamiliar to them, thereby often leading them to experience the “perplexity, hesitation, doubt” Dewey (1910, p. 9) saw as key to learning from experience. If students (or any partners) bring preconceived and unchallenged beliefs (e.g., stereotypes) and attitudes (e.g., prejudices) into their collaboration with unfamiliar others, their actions and interactions may take the form of undemocratic or otherwise undesirable behaviors (e.g., discrimination); and the full set of such problematic cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors may be further reinforced and carried forward into future action (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994). Furthermore, superficial encounters with and analysis of complex public policies and practices can result in persons defaulting to technocratic, status quo conditions rather than becoming the democratically-engaged agents of change that service-learning can be used to cultivate (Strand, 1999). Thus, it is important to examine a range of approaches to service-learning with an eye to the design elements that enable the pedagogy to avoid such outcomes and instead generate deeper learning. Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) conclude that “critical reflection...

provides the transformative link between the action of *servicing* and the ideas and understanding of *learning*" (emphasis in original, p. 14).

Eyler et al. (1996) also note that critical reflection "need not be a difficult process, but it does need to be a purposeful and strategic process" (p. 16). When it is understood as the component of service-learning that generates, deepens, and documents learning (Ash & Clayton 2009a, 2009b) it can be intentionally designed to help cultivate democratic civic identity. A structure such as the DEAL Model for Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton 2009a, 2009b)—which guides learners through Description of experiences, Examination of experiences through the lens of whatever the learning goals are, and Articulation of resultant Learning in a way that lends itself to enhanced future action—can easily be used to generate, deepen, and document the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with such an identity. As discussed above, the framings of democratic civic identity offered by Boyte (2009) and Palmer (2011) as well as the Civic Minded Graduate model (Steinberg et al., 2011) suggest such learning outcomes as capacities to work in the context of uncertainty and to create community, knowledge of public issues, listening and collaborative skills, and appreciation of diversity and conflict (see Ash & Clayton, 2009b; Whitney & Clayton, 2011 for examples of reflection prompts).

As discussed in Whitney and Clayton (2011), critical reflection can also help improve the quality of students' engagement with community members when it is structured for an examination of difficulties in making decisions, allocating responsibility, holding one another accountable, and recognizing the extent of shared understanding. Thus, critical reflection becomes democratic critical reflection that is key to cultivating democratic civic identity when the learning outcomes toward which it is designed are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the heart of such an identity.

Beyond this, though, critical reflection in service-learning becomes democratic critical reflection that is especially useful in developing democratic civic identity when it engages all partners. Democratic engagement is grounded in an understanding of reciprocity as co-creation of knowledge and practice, and this comes to life in critical reflection that explicitly positions all partners as co-educators, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge. Specifically, democratic critical reflection is, to a greater or lesser extent, designed by all partners in light of learning goals shaped by all partners and designed for the participation of all partners. Whitney and Clayton (2011) examine challenges of such multi-partner reflection that are particularly relevant and that also highlight some of the central tensions of democracy:

Although it has the potential benefit of creating a more inclusive space for shared learning, it also risks making the reflection space—whether physical or virtual—less authentic through the silencing of voices associated with reluctance to examine critically issues in which others are involved when those others are present ... this would necessitate the investment of time and capacity building into making the reflection space safe for this type of multi-partner reflection while also keeping it critical—in turn



heightening the significance of [service-learning] in producing outcomes associated with ... democracy .... (p. 180)

## Implications for Practice

Much of the theory and research presented has not come directly from service-learning or the study of democratic education. However, it has implications for the design and implementation of service-learning courses that have as their goal developing democratic civic identities.

### *Democratic Action in Service-Learning Courses*

1. The literature reviewed on action reinforces the importance of having service-learning students engaged in community-based activities that are directly related to learning objectives rather than being put into positions in which they are primarily observing. This is consistent with research showing that students benefit more from community service that provides direct service and interaction with diverse persons than when they are in service settings in which they do not provide direct service (Eyler & Giles, 1999).
2. Repeated community-based activities that are appropriate for the knowledge and skills of the students (i.e., that develop efficacy and expertise) can result in enhanced cognitive gains through feedback. Short-term or infrequent community service activities will not yield rich cognitive gains to the same extent as more extensive activities in a service-learning course. When students have multiple opportunities to conduct community-based activities (e.g., meetings in communities with diverse groups) that provide feedback on their efficacy, they can receive richer and more varied feedback than when they have a narrow set of experiences or no community-based experiences over time.
3. Community activities that involve direct service, particularly when the activities are based on democratic values and supported with critical reflection focused on generating democratic learning, are more likely to produce democratic attitudes and dispositions as well as a social justice and systemic orientation to community issues.
4. Because the perception of choice is important for developing and maintaining positive attitudes toward a specific population, the design of service-learning experiences should develop the sense of choice when possible. This can occur even when service-learning is required in a course or is a required course. As Bringle (2005) noted:

there may be many factors that promote the perception of choice in a course that requires service-learning. For example, students may have choice over placement sites, activities they engage in, community members with whom they collaborate, and nature of critical reflection activities they use (p. 175).

The role of perceived choice in producing attitude change and cognitive change is particularly important for those students who are neutral or negatively disposed toward the experience or toward the specific population, so the design of the service-learning course and the community-based experiences need to pay particular attention to this element for these students (Bingle, 2005).

### **Critical Reflection in Service-Learning Courses**

1. Reflection activities can be structured to provide students with the opportunities to develop and articulate learning from action and to evaluate how actions have provided feedback on what they learned through reflecting on activities in communities, including how they incorporated participatory practices and democratic skills and values. These should be designed after specific learning goals have been identified, including democratic learning goals (Ash & Clayton, 2009a, 2009b).
2. The feedback from System 1 and System 2 can be analyzed during reflection by considering which system is utilized by students at different stages of the service-learning course and whether this analysis is accurately based on feedback received from a variety of community and peer interactions over time (e.g., Was an approach successful? Was a skill useful? What do others tell a student about performance and effectiveness? How has performance in the community improved?). This reflection will contribute to developing meta-cognition by emphasizing clear expectations for the reflection processes, products, and rubrics for feedback (Ash & Clayton, 2009a, 2009b).
3. The comparison of System 1 and System 2 cognitive processing suggests that System 2 is an effortful system. Halpern and Hakel (2003) note that "varying the conditions under which learning takes place makes learning harder for learners but results in better learning" (p. 39). This variation can be achieved through the structure of critical reflection. To the degree that the level and type of effort is counter-normative (Clayton & Ash, 2004; Howard, 1998) for students, preparation and cognitive scaffolding with feedback are warranted. Ash and Clayton (2009a, 2009b) provide examples of a progressive approach to critical reflection based on Bloom's Taxonomy, in which prompts become more cognitively complex and presumably more challenging and effortful.
4. Critical reflection activities can be designed to have students report on changes and growth in self-awareness of democratic skills and knowledge, changes in performance, capacities to relate to others, awareness of limitations, and other meta-cognitive dimensions related to thinking, affect, and partnerships, all with an emphasis on their democratic qualities. These approaches to reflection may benefit from having students evaluate reflection products from earlier in their community experiences in order for them to become more aware of previous states, perspectives, and orientations and appreciate how they have changed and grown.

5. Critical reflection activities can be designed to allow students to explore the nature of their attitudes (e.g., toward communities, target groups for service, social issues), beliefs (e.g., causes of social issues), behaviors, and interactions. These reflection activities can be structured at different levels of analysis (e.g., individual, groups, communities, nonprofit and government agencies, social policy, social systems, national, international). The consistencies and inconsistencies between and among these levels (e.g., public good vs. self-interest) can be explored at the beginning, middle, and end of the course. They can also be explored with regard to the partnerships that were formed during the course as well as through the democratic themes that were presented in the course and analyzed through critical reflection.

### ***Democratic Partnerships in Service-Learning Courses***

1. Because individuals have inherent limitations in assessing their own competencies (i.e., skills, abilities, knowledge), settings in which students have interactions with multiple partners (e.g., with community organizations or residents, staff, peers, faculty) can provide richer feedback to the development of democratic civic identity in comparison to settings in which students are more isolated and have fewer partners with whom to interact. The feedback provided through interactions can be explored through critical reflection.
2. Consistent with democratic values (that partnerships should be fair, just, inclusive, participatory, and equitable) and consistent with intergroup contact theory (that interactions between groups are optimized when they occur, to the extent possible, among equals and with a common goal—i.e., students working *with* community partners), instructors should critically examine the design and implementation of a service-learning course with regard to these expectations for relationships. In addition, instructors can collect evidence from various constituencies (e.g., students, community partners) regarding the degree to which these goals have been achieved in relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Education for democratic citizenship involves human capacities relating to judgment, to choice, and, above all, to action. To be literate as a citizen requires more than knowledge and information: it includes the exercise of personal responsibility, active participation, and personal commitment to a set of values. Democratic literacy is a literacy of doing, not simply of knowing. Knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of democratic responsibility. (Morrill, 1982, p. 365)

Consistent with Morrill's assertion, our analysis justifies shifting the primary educational focus of pedagogies supporting the flourishing of democracy from democratic thinking to a more

encompassing view of learning outcomes (i.e., democratic civic identity). The analysis has examined research and theory from a variety of sources that (a) strengthen existing positions that provide a rationale for service-learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999) and (b) offer additional suggestions and insights for how to design service-learning courses to optimize democratic outcomes for students, for partnerships, and for other constituencies. This analysis also provides many opportunities for developing research that tests hypotheses and that generates and refines theories that underlie the various relationships among thinking, attitudes, action, reflection, and partnerships and that speak to the relationship between them and identity—both in their general form and with a specific focus on their democratic forms. Except at the general level, we have not detailed the specific nature and content of those democratic components of service-learning focused on cultivating democratic civic identity (e.g., relationships, content, service activities) because we believe that this critical step should be tailored by each set of partners (i.e., instructors, community members, students, staff) within the particular course and community context. Unfortunately, little is known about the fidelity with which service-learning is currently implemented with regard to principles of good practice in general or democratic standards and ideals in particular. However, given the unknown variability that is currently occurring in the implementation of service-learning courses, extant evidence supports the conclusion that service-learning is a particularly effective pedagogy for developing civic learning among students (Conway et al., 2009; Novak et al., 2007; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Similarly, little is known about the particular nuances of democratic thinking, action, and attitudes and their integration with the self. It is intriguing to imagine how much more convincing the case for service-learning as a vehicle for advancing democratic purposes and developing democratic civic identity could be with more intentional course design, better theory-based research, and more authentic evidence that reflect focused attention on democratic thinking, democratic attitudes, democratic action, democratic partnerships, and democratic critical reflection all designed to develop democratic civic identity.

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