

# Civic service through schools: an international perspective

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Civic service, which refers to activities that seek to improve the local, national or international community either through community service or service learning, is widespread in secondary schools around the world. Despite this pervasive presence, there are few studies that approach the subject from a cross-comparison perspective. This article addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive review of the international literature on civic service in terms of history, theory, research and practice. In terms of history and theory, the article brings together the work of several key proponents of civic service who, despite working in different countries and continents, placed civic service high in their educational agenda. In terms of research, it presents the most up-to-date research on the potential benefits and pitfalls of civic service. In terms of practice, it lists various limitations related to its implementation and presents possibilities for overcoming these. This section stresses the importance of establishing a respectful and honest relationship with intended beneficiaries to avoid fostering unhealthy social patterns, a key problem of many civic service programs. The article ends with areas for future research.

Keywords: *Civic service; Community service; Service learning; Work education; Experiential education*

## Introduction

The call for fostering community engagement through civic service has been embraced by governments, the non-profit sector and secondary schools worldwide. The Global Service Institute published a report in 2003 that sampled 210 civic service programmes in 57 different countries (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). Of these programmes, 77% involved youth as the main providers of the service. In another survey that involved over 3000 respondents from seven different countries (Australia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia, Sweden and the USA), youth were asked, ‘Do you ever do volunteer work in the community?’ and the results showed that youth volunteered generously, from a minimum of 20% (in the case of Sweden) of all respondents all the way to a maximum of 60% (in the case of Hungary) (Flanagan *et al.*, 1999). National ministries of education in countries as

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varied as Botswana, Nigeria, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago have institutionalised national service programmes for youth as young as 16 years old (Eberly, 1992). These programmes, some mandatory and others voluntary, allow students to participate in specific projects that improve the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of their communities.

Despite this global practice, there are few publications that offer a comprehensive analysis, from an international perspective, of school-related civic service. This article seeks to fill that gap by focussing in the following areas: It begins by offering an historical and theoretical framework of civic service through the work of several well-known educators who highlighted its importance. It then presents research that links civic service to personal and social growth, academic and intellectual performance and civic and political involvement. Afterwards it focusses on the main expressions of civic service worldwide, along with key limitations encountered in its implementation. The article ends with a delineation of areas of research that are still under explored.

### **Terminology and expressions of civic service**

Given that civic service is closely associated with community service and service learning, it is useful to distinguish between these three concepts from the outset. Civic service is ‘an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community recognised and valued by society’ (Sherraden, 2001, p. 2). Given that the focus of this article is youth in schools, we will consider community service and service learning as subsets of civic service. Their definitions are:

1. Community service is service that students provide to the school or community in which there is no prescribed learning agenda related to the academic curriculum.
2. Service learning is also service to the community but, in contrast to community service, it is intentionally connected to the regular curriculum so that students can make connections between the abstract theories of the classroom and their concrete experiences inside and outside the school.

Throughout the article, the term ‘school-related’ will be used as opposed to ‘school-based’. School-based implies that the service takes place inside the school or that it is solely organised by the school. School-related, our preferred term for the purposes of this article, refers to service that takes place inside or outside the school campus; while in some cases the service is organised by the school, in other instances it is organised by community agencies with the support or consent of the school.

### **Methodology**

Our objective was to gather and review up-to-date literature on civic service internationally. As such, we adopted three criteria to guide our search. First, we

focussed on civic service in the context of schools. Second, because our intention was to have a holistic picture of civic service, we searched for both scholarly and practitioner-oriented literature. Thus, we reviewed books, journal articles, conference presentations, websites from ministries of education and online publications by individuals and organisations actively involved in civic service. Third, with regard to the time frame, we concentrated mostly on literature published since 1980; however, for historical developments in the field, we also looked at publications before this period.

One key limitation we encountered was a dearth of research publications on civic service outside of North America (Canada and the USA). Despite doing a bibliographic search in four different languages—English, Spanish, Portuguese and French—we found relatively few *research* (as opposed to expository) studies focussing outside of North America, and those that we did find were often outdated. Moreover, the majority of the articles were of an anecdotal nature with no systematic analysis as to the benefits or pitfalls of the practice. This is also not too surprising given that research tends to be expensive, which again restricts the potential contributions of researchers living in low-income countries. Plus, given that access to the Internet in developing countries is limited, practitioners are at a disadvantage for setting up websites showcasing their work. It should also be noted that an international search in only four languages is clearly insufficient (even in four hegemonic languages like the ones mentioned), and thus a wider search in additional languages may yield important research data not included in this article. To compensate for this limitation and to extend the external validity of our conclusions, whenever possible we included articles that contained comparative references in their literature review and that compared their findings to what happens elsewhere.

### **Historical and theoretical foundations**

The modern concept of civic service emerged out of the collision of several economic, social and political forces during the nineteenth century (Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997). The combined forces of capitalism and industrialisation led to the break-up of small, economically self-sufficient and relatively stable communities, forcing millions of people to seek new livelihoods in urban centres. The vibrant social networks that had characterised pre-modern communities and provided a minimum level of material and emotional security to individuals were gradually undermined as people migrated to larger towns and cities. Responding to this social and economic upheaval, humanitarian reformers sought to use civic service as a viable alternative to re-create the lost social network that had provided stability in the past. In the USA, one of the first people to popularise the connection between schools and communities through service was philosopher John Dewey. Dewey was particularly concerned with the erosion of small communities and the intimate connections that existed among individuals in such settings. Although modernity had weakened the traditional community, he felt that the concept was too important to be abandoned and saw the school system as a key site where community could be revitalised (Dewey, 1929/1962). Dewey believed that to alleviate the growing sense

of alienation, anonymity and compartmentalisation so damaging to a democratic attitude, education needed to be connected to community life. To achieve this 'social spirit' two conditions needed to be met (Dewey, 1916/1968, p. 358): 'The school must itself be a community life in all which that implies [and] the learning in school should be continuous with that out of school'. To establish the numerous points of contact between the worlds of school and surrounding environment, Dewey stressed a pedagogical philosophy of 'learning by doing' that allowed children to explore the community through occupational and non-occupational activities. By involvement in specific issues affecting the locality, he believed children would be more likely to learn the skills and dispositions required for responsible citizenship. He saw in occupations, as well as in other contextualised pedagogies, the possibility of children constructing knowledge by experiencing the world, thereby developing a keen sense of social usefulness. Morton and Saltmarsh (1997, p. 138) concluded that, with regard to community service, Dewey's legacies included 'an abiding faith that education leads to social reform, an expectation that schools are the social centre for local communities, [and] an articulation of public and civic roles for ordinary people that would lead them to social and political activism'.

More or less around the same time that Dewey opened up his Lab School in Chicago in 1896, philosopher and poet Rabindranath Tagore founded a learning centre in Santiniketan, near Calcutta, India (Tagore, 1998). Called Brahmacharyasrama (later renamed Patha Bhavana), the school sought to teach children to grasp and live out a sense of interdependence with others and the natural world. Tagore was concerned that in modern schools most learning took place inside a classroom, cut off from community life. He felt that if children were going to care for the community, they needed to live deeply within it. Tagore also challenged the Enlightenment-based, anthropocentric view of the world that placed humans at the centre while the rest of the living world was made to cater to their needs. He wrote, 'Love [for] the earth, and for the things of the earth, is possible without materialism, without the vulgarity of avarice' (1998, p. 675). Tagore argued that schooling alienated children from nature and failed to saturate their minds and bodies with the idea that the human world needed to co-exist in harmony with the natural world. 'Tagore felt that the earth, with its colours, perfumes, music, movement, self-revelation and continual wonders of the unexpected, was in itself a perpetual learning experience' (Jain, 2001, p. 28). To encourage this sense of protection toward, and harmony with, nature, Tagore felt that activities such as gardening, pruning, animal husbandry and tree planting were essential for students.

Whereas Dewey's model of civic service emphasised the satisfaction of basic material needs, Tagore's model of service was designed to satisfy the artistic and spiritual needs of the entire village of Santiniketan. Like Dewey, however, Tagore believed that to effectively integrate the community with the school, one first needed to create a sense of integration within the school itself. One way to accomplish this was by having students participate in the school's daily chores: Sweeping, cooking, washing dishes, drawing water, cultivating and harvesting. Students would then feel that they were part of something larger than themselves. Thereby, while developing a

sense of internal cohesion and social usefulness in students, schools could also take an active role in helping redefine community life. As a result, students and community members organised on a regular basis festivities that included poetry, music, painting, dance and theatre, both inside and outside the school. These festivities coincided with seasonal changes, which was Tagore's way of reminding people of the importance of staying in harmony with changes in nature (Chayan, 1994).

As Tagore's school in Santiniketan progressed, a new school opened up in Verne, near Nice, France, in 1935. Its founder, Celestin Freinet, who has been called 'France's Dewey', created a pedagogy known as 'education through work' (Freinet, 1949/1993). Freinet's pedagogy was based on the idea that work is at the centre of human activity and development. He opposed work that was exploitative or based on mindless drudgery; instead, he supported work that was useful, joyful and dignified. He believed in the power of 'work-play', a concept that denoted exposing children to useful, work-related skills without losing sight of their natural inclination to enjoy activities. Just as children take their play quite seriously, he said, so can work become an enjoyable play-like activity that fosters physical skill, spontaneity, surprise, creativity and mental prowess—in other words, qualities similar to those found in play itself. As much as possible, he felt that work needed to take place outside, in the community and in nature, so that the fruit of children's work would have a strong community-oriented purpose. As Freinet asked, 'What sentiments unite the inhabitants of a village if it is not work, which requires all people to carry out actions and movements that engrave their pace and their meaning on the behaviour of individuals who are linked to one another by spiritual as much as practical collaboration' (1949/1993, p. 343).

Freinet asserted that having children work in authentic contexts would develop in them a feeling of fraternity that would unite child, family and community. Children would sense that they were helping something much larger than themselves. The ability to care for and be cared about by others in the context of schools was extensively developed by Noddings (1984). Much like her predecessors, Noddings believed that the main goal of education should be to prepare students 'for caring and being cared for in the human domain and full receptivity and engagement in the nonhuman world' (1984, p. 174). While she devoted most of her writings to developing a philosophy of care and relatedness inside the school campus by engaging students in actual help for others, she also believed that such qualities could be developed effectively outside of school, for example by doing community service in hospitals, nursing homes and animal shelters. These activities would also bring together adults and children in such ways that 'education [becomes] an enterprise in which all of us should be engaged' (Noddings, 1984, p. 188).

Whereas civic service is generally considered a positive experience, authors influenced by the work of Paulo Freire cautioned about the potential dangers of charitable work that did not include a critical examination of the social and political forces that created the need for charity in the first place (Maybach, 1996). As mentioned previously, civic service emerged in the nineteenth century in response to

glaring economic inequities that resulted from the transition between small, tight-knit, agrarian villages and large, anonymous industrial urban centres. It is during this period that the commons were eliminated, land became increasingly privatised and labour commodified. Modern-day poverty has similar dynamics in that the majority of poor people are poor as a result of an unequal distribution of resources, which too often fosters an extremely debilitating culture of poverty (Ryan, 1976). Without a critical analysis of the conditions that promote poverty, it is too easy for the provider of help to blame the recipient for his or her condition, a dynamic that may be present in certain types of charitable community service (see, e.g. Marin, 1995). Commenting on this patronising behaviour, Dewey expanded, 'What is sometimes called a benevolent interest in others may be but an unwitting mask for an attempt to dictate to them what their good shall be' (1916/1968, p. 121). A related questionable practice affects many school-related civic service programmes that focus solely on the growth of the students, ignoring the consequences for recipients or the community as a whole. The lack of a true dialogue between benefactor and recipient perpetuates forms of oppression and dehumanisation between the haves and the have-nots. As Freire wrote, 'Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those whose right to speak has been denied them' (1968/1974, pp. 76–77).

The philosophers and theorists presented in this section all view civic service as an essential strategy for developing social habits of cooperation and collective responsibility. They argue that by bringing together the child and the social and natural worlds inside and outside of school, grounding learning in personal experience rather than abstractions and creating opportunities for dialogue based on mutual support, they can promote in the child an enlarged sense of self that involves the well-being of others.

### **Research on civic service**

The main strand of research on civic service has sought to identify its effects on students (as opposed to the recipients of the students' service). Conducting such research can be a highly convoluted enterprise that goes beyond the usual research methodology issues (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). The most difficult problem is that service is *not* a uni-dimensional, easily identifiable task with uniform objectives, as many classroom lessons are. Despite this difficulty, some conclusions can be drawn in at least three general areas of development: Personal and social growth, academic and intellectual performance and civic and political involvement.

#### *Personal and social growth*

Research on children's personal and psychological growth focusses on the transition from dependency in childhood to independence in adulthood, where one can make decisions on one's own and feel a sense of competence in the adult world. In general, research in the USA has found that community service and service learning produce

benefits in this area, including such outcomes as an increased sense of personal efficacy, self-esteem, confidence in social skills and ability to build positive relationships with other students and adults (Conrad & Hedin, 1982, 1991; Furco, 1994; Giles & Eyler, 1998). These findings hold in both quantitative and qualitative, and in long-term and short-term, studies. For instance, in their 1982 study of 27 school-sponsored programmes in the USA, Conrad and Hedin found that students who were involved in service projects gained in terms of personal competence and social responsibility, and developed a more mature understanding of the people living in their community and the problems affecting them; they also found that community service programmes positively influenced students' opinions of groups such as the elderly, the police and businesspeople (Conrad & Hedin, 1982, 1991). Other studies have shown that in comparison to control groups, children who experience community service are more likely to develop productive relationships with other people, feel appreciated by others, have a sense of the social utility of education and display self-confidence (e.g. for the USA, see Rutter & Newmann, 1989).

In terms of increasing a sense of personal and social growth, research on the Self-Help Barangay High Schools in the Philippines offers important evidence (Orata, 1978). Also known as Barrio High Schools, these schools are completely self-supportive (from the contributions of parents and student earnings) and combine a solid curriculum in both academic and vocational subjects. All students have to spend part of their week working outside of the school contributing to the economic development of the community (barangay) and earning enough money to pay for tuition and other expenses. Orata, who studied barangay schools extensively, concluded that the students' work improved their maturity and their ability to relate to others in a respectful manner, particularly to those doing menial work (1978).

#### *Academic and intellectual performance*

While academic achievement has not been a central concern for community service research, it has been of more interest for service learning research. In the case of community service, there are few links between service and higher achievement, in great part because most programmes are not designed to improve this skill (Alt & Medrich, 1994). However, community service activities that require students to focus on academic content (e.g. tutoring) have shown positive academic effects. In a meta-analysis of tutoring studies from the USA, Cohen, Kulik and Kulik (1982) found that tutoring programmes had positive effects on the academic performance of both tutees and tutors. These findings were strongest for tutoring in reading and mathematics, but particularly the latter. Another important finding comes from research done by the Ministry of Education in Argentina on its programme of *community groups of study* (Ministerio de Educación, 2000). These study groups assist students who have dropped out of school to catch up with their studies and eventually re-join the school. The programme involves intensive community service, such as cleaning the neighbourhood, making signs asking residents not to throw

rubbish on the street and respecting public spaces, collaborating with various neighbourhood festivities and elaborating a monthly bulletin with neighbourhood news. Preliminary results have shown that a combination of the groups of study and community work has been instrumental in encouraging children to return to school and having parents motivate their children to remain there.

In terms of general development of cognitive abilities, a study conducted by Conrad and Hedin (1982) showed that when US students were asked to react to a series of simulated real-life problems, those who had participated in either community service or service learning tended to display higher problem-solving abilities than did control-group students. Other studies have found positive outcomes in terms of critical thinking, open-mindedness and solving day-to-day problems (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). These outcomes, however, required two basic conditions: (a) The real-life simulations needed to be closely related to the service students had performed; and (b) students needed to reflect on and discuss their service experience.

#### *Civic and political involvement*

Several studies have found that students' sense of civic responsibility is greatly enhanced by service programmes (e.g. Alt & Medrich, 1994; Rutter & Newmann, 1989; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). Students tend to see themselves more as part of the community, to value service, to have greater racial tolerance and to believe that civic involvement is crucial for solving recalcitrant social problems. Youniss, McLellan and Yates (1997) reviewed studies in the USA that reported a connection between youths' participation in organised community activities and their civic behaviours at least 15 years later in adulthood. Results showed that adults who were involved in community service projects and high school government as adolescents were more likely to belong to pro-social organisations than were adults who had not participated in school or community affairs.

While most studies on civic involvement show positive results, political involvement presents a more mixed picture depending on the country. In the USA, Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) tested the effect of an experiential learning programme on adolescents' knowledge about and attitude toward local government. They found that high school students who worked as volunteers in the offices of government officials gained significantly in terms of political understanding, but this did not necessarily mean that they had more positive attitudes toward political participation. In other countries, however, the situation is different. In Colombia, when students have participated in informing citizens of the importance of voting, their interest in political participation has been heightened (Arenas, 2001). This is also the case in France, where secondary students have protested overcrowded classes, a lack of teachers, run-down buildings and the lack of space by organising massive strikes that have paralysed the educational system in many French cities (see, for instance, WSWS, 1998, October 15). The work of Yates and Youniss (1999) shows that the distinct political and cultural histories of a given country may



increase or decrease the likelihood that the students' civic commitment translates into an increased participation in the country's politics.

### **Practice of civic service**

School-related civic service is practiced in five main ways: (a) As a cultural expectation embedded in the daily activities of schools; (b) As an integral and mandatory component of the curriculum, (c) as a semi-integral and voluntary component of the curriculum, (d) as a high school graduation requirement and (e) as a measure of discipline or restoration.

#### *As a cultural expectation embedded in daily activities*

In some countries it is expected that children of all ages should participate in the daily functioning of the school. This participation, a part of the school's hidden curriculum, seeks to foster in students a sense of responsibility and identification towards the well-being of the institution. For instance, in Chinese and Japanese schools 'children are responsible for cleaning the desks, sweeping and scrubbing the floors, emptying wastebaskets and washing the blackboards...[and] food is brought to the classroom to be served by the children, who are also responsible for the after-lunch cleanup' (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p. 63). It should be pointed out that these activities and the cultural expectation that embodies them are more common in the elementary and middle school level, and less common to the point of disappearing in the latter years of secondary schooling (for China, see Sing, 1996; for Japan, see Ellington, 2001).

#### *As an integral and mandatory component of the curriculum*

One of the most common manifestations of this form of civic service is through work education (similar to the one proposed by Freinet's pedagogy). A distinction, however, should be made between conventional vocational education programmes that teach skills with no connection to the community, and the more alternative programmes that provide skills with the purposeful intention of assisting the community. It is this latter form that constitutes civic service. This form tends to be a mandatory component of the curriculum for all students at the school or at least for those in the vocational track, and it constitutes a form of service learning. One well-known example is the Botswana Brigades, a secondary-level vocational programme that offers training in such areas as agriculture, forestry, livestock, horticulture, textiles, carpentry, construction, accountant and computer training (Rensburg & Chiepe, 1996). The programme exists throughout Botswana and provides under-privileged high school students with the connections between work-related skills and appropriate economic development. The difference between the Brigades and more conventional vocational programmes is that the Brigades seek to benefit the community at large by operating outside of school campuses and by using local cultural references. Despite difficulties of implementation, the Brigades have been

considered historically a highly effective model for instilling in students civic values and supporting local development.

Another case is presented by socialist governments, and their use of civic service. In countries such as China, Nicaragua in the 1980s, Tanzania and Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s, and Cuba, governments stipulated that productive and manual work (e.g. working in agriculture or in massive literacy campaigns) was one of the most effective means to develop in youth a particular social consciousness that corresponded to a socialist ideal (Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). Some of these efforts lost their impetus over the years for numerous reasons—not the least of which was the arrival of capitalist regimes—but Cuba stands out as a country that has continued to promote productive and manual work through its ‘schools to the countryside’, a programme created in 1966 by which most urban adolescents spent up to 45 days a year working for a few hours a day on plantations growing sugar cane, coffee, tobacco, citrus and other products (Gasparini, 2000). It should be noted that by 2004, the number of days Cuban urban youth worked in the countryside was decreased to 30 days a year (MINED, 2004). The strategies in these various countries have all sought to break down the separation between urban and rural life, improve the dignity of manual labour, develop a sense of collectivism and enhance students’ sense of altruism.

*As a semi-Integral and voluntary component of the curriculum*

This takes the form of an extra class on community service for credit, or takes place in an after-school or summer programme. Generally, community agencies assist schools in placing the students in a service setting and often there is little connection between the service and the regular curriculum. This is an extremely common form of civic service being promoted in countries around the world (Roker, 1994; Yates & Youniss, 1999). In Japan, for example, with the encouragement of the Ministry of Education, high schools have offered such courses as social welfare, community service and voluntary activity since 1989 (Takahashi & Hatano, 1999). Five years after the programme started, 11,000 elementary and high schools had special programmes for community service. Another example is programmes set up by international agencies whereby high school students go to a different country to provide a service. For instance, the international agency Habitat for Humanity has established partnerships with high schools in several countries through which a group of students help build housing for low-income families, sometimes in their own country, sometimes abroad. One of these partnerships is with the Kyoto Nishi High School in Japan; students from this high school go to the Philippines to assist poor individuals to build their own home (Japan Harold, 2001).

*As a high school graduation requirement*

This form of service is common in many developing and some developed nations. This service is mandatory and generally has little connection with the regular curriculum. One country where this system is well developed is Colombia, where

high school students need to fulfil a minimum of 80 hours of social service in order to obtain a high school diploma. The social service can be done in such varied areas as health, environment, literacy and basic adult education. Often it is the school that makes arrangements with poor neighbourhoods or community agencies to place the students (OPS/OMS Colombia, 1994).

*As a measure of discipline or restoration*

The service can take place on school grounds through menial tasks such as campus clean up or it can take outside of the school with the aid of social service agencies. For more serious offences, community service can be used as an alternative to punishment, an idea that has been tested in the USA and Canada. In the USA, for instance, the 2001 'No Child Left Behind Act' provides grants to schools that create a different option to suspension or expulsion. In Canada, the 1998 'National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention' does something similar. In the more sophisticated programmes schools attempt to match the punishment with the misdeed to reach restoration. For instance, if a student engages in fights with peers, he or she may have to undergo conflict resolution training and assist younger children and peers to solve their problems peacefully. If a student is caught with illegal drugs or alcohol, the student may be ordered to attend a rehabilitation centre and then work there as a volunteer. The key principle behind restorative justice is the restoration of relationships. It involves the offender (in this case the student), the victim and the community in the search for solutions that promote repair and reconciliation (Leung, 1999). Generally, this form of civic service is not related to the regular curriculum.

**Critical issues regarding civic service**

Based on the available publications of both an empirical and non-empirical nature, there are five main critical issues that hinder the implementation and sustainability of effective civic service programmes: (a) Conceptual issues, (b) financial issues, (c) pedagogical issues, (d) power differential issues and (e) evaluation issues. Each critical issue is accompanied by a recommendation on how to address it.

*Conceptual issues*

Due to a lack of training and a misunderstanding of the importance of civic service, it is not uncommon for teachers and administrators to restrict civic service to picking up trash on campus, cleaning the school bathrooms or doing other menial chores (Kraft, 1996). While there is nothing wrong per se with these activities, if civic service is just restricted to these then the full potential of service is lost and it becomes relegated to a form of punishment that students start to frown upon. Providing adequate training to school staff is an important strategy for overcoming this problem, in addition to stipulating in schools' mission and policies the importance of service. Once service becomes a fundamental aspect of the school, it is

easier to start a conversation with educational stakeholders regarding the importance of having children experience forms of service that go beyond menial chores.

### *Financial issues*

Some forms of civic service can be expensive. It can be costly to transport students back and forth to the site where the service is provided, to pay for the students' lunches, to purchase any necessary materials to do the service, especially in the case of work-related civic service. For instance, to establish a community garden the school would require hoes, spades, rakes, soil, seeds and other materials. In the case of the USA, a country mired in litigation, school liability insurance often does not cover students who are off school grounds unless school staff is supervising. As a result, many US schools do not encourage off-campus community service for fear of being involved in potentially expensive litigation.

To overcome this issue, schools need to be creative in finding alternative sources of money. In Colombia, high schools involved in reforestation campaigns have established partnerships with non-governmental organisations that provide the necessary materials to do the reforestation free of charge (Arenas, 2001). In the Philippines, students at Self-Help Barangay High Schools find their own means through self-employment (Orata, 1978). In the case of Japanese students going to the Philippines to construct low-income housing, schools set up several fund-raising strategies that allow students to raise funds for the activity (Japan Harold, 2001). To overcome the problem of litigation in the USA, some school districts carry insurance coverage for students engaged in civic service through a vocational-technical school-to-work programme. Thus, there are numerous paths that schools can follow to come up with the necessary funding to finance the service.

### *Pedagogical issues*

There is often a lack of connection between the service and the regular curriculum. The problem is greater for community service than for service learning, but both areas suffer in this area. In the case of community service, given that it is not intended to be connected to the academic curriculum, too often students are afforded few opportunities to reflect on their experiences in terms of their personal, social and academic growth, and on their contribution to democracy and an enhanced community life (Wilson & Musick, 1997). For instance, if students are assisting the homeless they may end up viewing poor people in a stereotypical and superficial fashion if they are not allowed adequate time for studying the larger social, political and economic forces that cause poverty in the first place. Moreover, a lack of preparation and reflection can also serve to reinforce the *individual* benefits of the experience as opposed to the *public* benefits (Rutter & Newmann, 1989). In the case of service learning, while this problem is not as acute, it nonetheless suffers from the same difficulties, given that in many countries there is a strict academic programme that teachers have to follow which prevents them from diverging into additional topics such as service to the community.

Another problem is that although students may be eager to engage in community activism, many may feel they lack the necessary skills to help in a meaningful way. This can be addressed in two ways: First, students must receive sufficient training throughout the course of the service so that they can recognise and appreciate how the service is benefiting them and their community. This exploration could be done through in-class discussions and writing and reading assignments. Second, the service must meet a real need in the community, one that is recognised by community members as important to enhance their quality of life.

#### *Power differential issues*

Another critical issue is the lack of involvement of actual service beneficiaries in deciding what is best for them (Maybach, 1996). Students doing community service may adopt a deficit approach that focusses on the negative aspects of the community being served. A relationship of paternalism may develop whereby beneficiaries are seen as childlike or powerless victims. One example comes from a school in Colombia, where students and teachers decided to beautify the streets in a poor neighbourhood by planting trees. The school informed the residents but did not include them in the decision-making process. As a result, residents did not feel any sense of responsibility toward the trees, which led to no one taking care of them and eventually most of the trees died off or were uprooted (Arenas, 2001).

To highlight the respectful and honest interaction that should exist between service provider and intended beneficiary, it is essential for schools to adopt an enrichment model that highlights the resources of community residents (Maybach, 1996). Such dialogue would establish a relationship of equality among the various parties, lead to a more authentic understanding of the community, and ultimately create the foundation for adopting the most effective strategies for providing help. Rather than adopting a patronising attitude whereby students and teachers feel (often unconsciously) superior, school members learn to see the people they intend to serve as human beings with strengths and faults.

#### *Evaluation issues*

The absence of an evaluation component is another major problem. According to a global survey on civic service done by McBride, Benítez and Sherraden (2003, p. 39) in which they surveyed 210 programmes in 57 countries, only 29% of the programmes reported 'some evaluation efforts' and of these they could not determine the purpose or methods of evaluation. It is common for many civic service projects not to be evaluated, either because teachers are unsure how to conduct an evaluation or because they wait to conduct it until the end of the service, which generally coincides with the end of the school year when everyone is busy taking care of other matters. Consequently, in the rare case an evaluation is done, it is seldom used in a meaningful way to inform future programmes. Moreover, service recipients are not included in the process of evaluating the benefits of the service.

Evaluating the results of a service project from the perspective of both receivers and providers of the service is critical for its improvement. The best evaluation is one that combines a formative and summative component; that is, the evaluation takes place at strategic points throughout the course of the project and at its completion. Just as it is important to establish a dialogue among the constituent parties of the service as a key element of an enrichment model, the evaluation should focus on the positive aspects of the service while strengthening its weaknesses. One possibility is to use appreciative inquiry, which builds on past achievements, establishes consensus around a shared vision for the future, and re-evaluates strategies to achieve that vision (Cooperrider, Sorensen & Yaeger, 2001).

An important aspect that is generally not evaluated is the inter-sectoral collaboration that often takes place, or should take place, in civic service. Effective civic service programmes bring together schools, non-profit organisations, governmental entities and the private sector in ways that can be extremely beneficial to the community as a whole. While incorporating these actors into the evaluation certainly makes it more complex, the results will be so much richer and, in the long run, more useful.

### **Summary and future research directions**

This article showed how efforts to include civic service as an integral part of schools date back to at least the beginning of the twentieth century, when philosophers of education recognised the value of serving others. John Dewey in the USA, Rabindranath Tagore in India, Celestin Freinet in France, among others, argued that children should be stimulated to participate in specific projects that improved their communities' social, political, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. The notion of community was for them inseparable from schooling, and they believed that to develop a sense of caring and respect for others, students needed to become involved in real-life settings where they could contribute meaningfully. Educators around the world have supported this call, where the practice of civic service has increased over time.

With respect to the impact of community service on students, research findings have consistently demonstrated that well-designed civic service programmes are successful in developing students' personal and social growth, intellectual performance and various forms of civic and political involvement (albeit not necessarily voting participation by youth). On the whole, we conclude that when civic service is implemented and administered correctly, it can be a highly effective pedagogical strategy for breaking down the artificial barriers between school and the larger community, and for having students become active participants in bettering the social and environmental conditions of their surroundings. To improve on civic service practices, there are five areas that need further research at the level of the student, school, community, inter-sectoral collaboration and larger society.

1. *At the student level, are students benefiting from mandatory civic service when it is an alternative to suspension and expulsion?* While schools in the USA, Canada and

England are experimenting with using service as an alternative to suspension and expulsion, there is little research that assesses the effectiveness of such programmes. Some of the questions to be investigated include: What type of offences are suitable for using service as an option? Should the service try to match the offence, and should restorative justice be a prominent part of the alternative? Could not using service as a form of punishment give community involvement as a whole a poor name? These are just a few of the questions that require empirical answers before this promising strategy becomes more widespread.

2. *At the institutional level, what local school policies and practices support and enhance civic service?* At the international level, it is clear that some nationwide programmes are more effective than others. For instance, while the international *Fe y Alegría* programme in 14 different Latin American countries is considered to be highly effective in fostering in students a spirit of community service, there is a lack of research for determining what factors are responsible for its success (Fe y Alegría, 2000). The programme, which focusses in part on vocational education and community development, has existed since 1955 and offers services to over 1 million people. Despite Fe y Alegría's extensive practice, there is little research that explores its accomplishments. Thus it becomes imperative to identify key institutional policies and practices that ensure the success of community service and attempt to replicate the results in schools with similar characteristics.
3. *At the community level, in what ways do service recipients benefit from civic service?* This is a question that researchers and practitioners constantly ask themselves. To date, little research has sought to ascertain the usefulness of community service to intended beneficiaries. There is some research demonstrating that children who receive academic assistance from older students do tend to learn more, as some studies in the USA (Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982) and Argentina (Ministerio de Educación, 2000) have shown, but less is known about non-tutoring forms of service. For example, in the case of the *Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement* of Sri Lanka, perhaps the best known educational programme in that country to offer assistance to poor communities by sending groups of secondary-age students to participate in local development (Ariyaratne, 1988), there is little research on how target communities are involved in selecting the most appropriate service that respects local customs and values. While Sarvodaya is by all accounts a highly effective movement that addresses local development well (Hastings, 2002), research is needed to determine *how* local voices are heard and choices made that avoid reproducing unhealthy social patterns that blame the victim or that foster inept forms of economic development.
4. *At the inter-sectoral level, what are the most effective strategies for bringing together key societal stakeholders?* It is becoming increasingly common for a wide network of societal actors to become involved in civic service projects. The dual relationship school-neighbourhood or school-community organisation is often enlarged to include other key actors. In Nogales, Mexico (right on the border

between Mexico and the USA), a secondary school undertook a re-vegetation project that now includes the collaboration of the local municipality, several neighbourhoods, assembly plants located in Nogales belonging to multinational corporations and two universities from both sides of the border. Little is known, however, of the mechanisms that ensure a smooth collaboration among these various sectors, and some of the lessons derived from them that may help guarantee a successful long-term collaboration.

5. *At the societal level, does civic service have the potential to develop social capital and an ethic of care in the society as a whole?* Most research studies have focussed on short-term gains over the course of a semester or a year, but less is known about the long-term consequences that may be engendered by community service participation. As modern societies expand and become more pluralistic and complex, the task of understanding the concept of ‘community’ is becoming more challenging. In studies on youth in Japan (Takahashi & Hatano, 1999) and other countries (Flanagan *et al.*, 1999), youth experience a ‘crisis of meaning’ in trying to make sense of a fragmented reality. It appears that service may be one of the mechanisms by which a healthy sense of ‘meaning’ can be developed as an adult, along with a sense of compassion. Further research can help uncover how civic service may contribute to moving society from its highly individualistic penchant to one of care and commitment for others.

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