Beyond experiential education: Knowledge and power relations in Service Learning

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research paper is to explore the representation of knowledge and power relations in literature on service learning. There is a need to consider the problem of whether and how work-integrated experiential service learning benefits all stakeholders through its institutionalization in higher education. The method used for this exploratory, analytical research was to undertake a selective review of literature on service learning covering the period of 2006 – 2015 using Rancièrian conceptions of knowledge and power relations – in terms of democratic power and police order. Not all the research literature for this period could be analysed here. Thus, only a selection of this research literature is analysed in this paper. It does include publications by leading edge authors in the field of service learning. There are two major findings from this study. First, research literature reviewed here on service learning indicates that students depend on teachers' knowledge because of institutional requirements governing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment thereby reproducing intellectual inequality. However, there is some literature which suggests possibilities for students to produce knowledge through serving. Second, this literature foregrounds democratic power while neglecting the enabling or constraining power of the 'police order.' One of the implications of this study is that there is a need for a *framework* that addresses these contradictory forces. It is not a matter of either or, but of AND. There is a need for framework that addresses the tensions between already existing structures of inequality against any desires for intellectual equality, between the power of democracy and police order - simultaneously, rather than treating them separately.

Keywords: Service learning, experiential education, power, democracy, knowledge

Introduction

Service learning is an approach of experiential education involving students in supporting, contributing to the community and bridging the theory and practice boundary to foster meaningful scholarship in action". It seems to "have a high-impact, apparently moving from the margins to the mainstream of higher education" (Butin, 2015: 5). Service-learning which is also known as "community engagement" concerns "the linkage of academic coursework with community-based service within the framework of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection as both a pedagogy and philosophy" (Butin, 2010: 1).

Butin and Pianko (2012: 159) acknowledge "there are many modes and models to engage with the community such as community engagement, civic engagement, public scholarship, translational research, action research, participatory action research, community-based research". There is also a variety of views about service learning with respect to pedagogical methods; being a means of civic and multicultural enhancement, and a mode of social justice. This variability brings its own problems. Research into service learning also raises concerns about the issue of power relations but does not explicitly and implicitly address (Butin, 2006). Innovative pedagogies in service learning

have brought the benefits of relocating students' learning from the classroom to real world. However, "biases, unearned privilege, and power" (Michell, 2008: 57) in the enactment of service learning require close analysis, illumination and discussion. This article analyses Rancière's concepts of intellectual equality and democratic power and social justice first. Then systematic literature review of service learning in terms of knowledge and power is analysed before bringing Rancière's thoughts in service learning for discussion.

Objective

This paper raises specific issues concerning power inequities which aims at social justice through the lens of democracy and theoretical knowledge using the work of Rancière (1991, 2011a). In particular, these mean the empowerment of students where power inequities in service learning is interactive with knowledge. The point is that in this literature review of service learning, the issue of power are knowledge are largely not discussed or theorised, well defined. There is not a great deal of evidence in this literature about these issues. This is what will be shown in this paper with comprehensive literature review which means except for some key authors with recent and relevant papers such as Butin (2006; 2010; 2015) and Mitchell (2008), most of the papers cited were published from 2010-2016 with the most significant literature review in the field. By this I mean this study is not reviewing, reporting or summarising what is up to date in the field nor comparing views among authors. The paper uses Rancière's (1991; 2011b) concepts knowledge and power as the analytical tools for the current literature review of service learning. The article also aims to give insights of the relationship among stakeholders in service learning enactment.

Theory: Framing the Analysis of Knowledge and Power

Jacques Rancière's (1991) practical ideas have relevance to the debate over service learning in higher education. For instance, in *Althusser's Lesson* Jacques Rancière (2011c) questions the idea of focusing solely on the theoretical level - of learning exclusively through books – and in particular, of learning only from the classics. Students can say everything, provided nothing that nothing they say has practical effects. However, focusing solely on theory, leaves much at stake on the practical level. The focus on pure theory means university education cannot have practical effects.

A practical idea to be found in the English translation of the intellectual adventure that is *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons on Intellectual Emancipation*, is that explanation runs contrary to intellectual equality. Rather than explaining Rancière (1991) practical ideas, I follow his practice of rewriting those of others by reassembling, summarizing or otherwise paraphrasing them into terms that speak to service learning in higher education. My paper consists in translating Rancière's (1991) writing into the vocabulary of service learning so as to (re)frame current problems and debates in this field, and informed by the work of Singh (2009; Singh, Harreveld & Chen, 2012; Singh & Meng, 2013).

Expert knowledge and intellectual equality

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière's (1991) pedagogy is directed at convincing students of their capacity to learn based on the equality of all human intelligence has for learning. In contrast, pedagogies that act to transmit knowledge through explanations tend to generate and perpetuate a structure of inequality between those claiming to explain and those whose ignorant requires such explanations. This structure of inequality is re-enforced each time educators provide knowledge and thereby reassert their intellectual

superiority. The key pedagogical problem is having students reveal their intelligence to themselves, rather than transmit knowledge (Rancière, 1991: 28).

In terms of teaching, Rancière's (1991: 17) works to verify the presupposition "that each ignorant person could become for another person the master who would reveal to him his intellectual power." This presupposition of intellectual equality must extend to everyone, and not just one privileged category (May, 2011). Thus, Rancière (1991) does not say whose intellectual equality might be presupposed and verified, nor does he say in what areas this intellectual equality might be applied. Thus, teaching involves verifying the presupposition of intellectual equality can mean working with a Vietnamese woman who sees herself as ignorant or is seen by others as ignorant can become another person through revealing to her, her intellectual power for theorising, for critical thinking, for connecting academics and knowledge contributing. Vietnamese theorising is an instance of democratic interruption in a world where English and theories in English now dominate university education and research in countries within and beyond the Anglosphere.

Police Power and Democratic Power

In his "Ten Theses on Politics", Rancière (2001) contends that there are two kinds of power namely the power of what he calls the "police order" and the power of democracy – the power of the demos – the people.

The Power of the Police Order

The power of the police order says that there is nothing to be seen, that there is nothing to do, that there is nothing to say. In other words, the police order consists of those bodies that are assigned can be named by their particular places in, and tasks of defining, allocating and making visible ways of doing and not doing, ways of being and not being, and ways of saying and not saying. The police order sees that speaking English is understood as an academic discourse and while speaking another language (e.g. Vietnamese) is just noise.

The power of the police order to "explain" to the masses what is in their best interest from a superior position of claiming expert knowledge. Here, the education of the masses denounces their ideological illusions or necessary ignorance. This intellectual hierarchy finds its power in rationalising all forms of inequality. Experts claim power through demonstrating the ignorance and incapacities of other people (Rancière, 1991: 129). In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière (2009) notes two strategies used by those in power to demonstrate and redress people's ignorance. First, being seen as sitting in the darkness, people may be conceived as a being passive, thus requiring countless devices to "activate" them. Second, attempts are made to pull the people out of their position of darkness, their normal, comfortable life through brief provocations of through, in order to push them to become doers or agent. In explaining to the people what they ought to understand about society, they insert a wedge between those who know and the "ignorant" masses, thereby portraying the latter as passive and powerless fools, numbed by society's spectacles. Such practices reproduce the stultifying division between those who have knowledge and power, and those who said to lack the power to understand and the knowledge make judgements.

The power of democracy. In contrast, the power of the people disrupts the police order through dissensus which focuses on partitioning or redistributing what is taken to be sensible and to make sense (Rancière, 1991). Dissensus is "the process of transforming the sensible by placing it in conflict with a rival conception of the world" (Tanke, 2011: 103). Dissensus is a method used here to redistribute the prevailing sense and sensibility associated with critical thinking. The power of dissensus consists in transforming what is

seen, done and said through the appearance of those who have a part in the police order but do not count. The power of dissensus consists in refiguring and making perceptible what there is to do, to be seen and said.

In Rancierean democracy, the power concept refers to "all those with no special entitlement to exercise it" (Rancière, 2011a: 78). Democratic power is concerned with the question of how what is regarded as "sensible is distributed, partitioned, and shared" (May, 2011: 18-19). Rancière (2011a) argues that democratic power entails the negotiation of agreements between those who are governed and do the work (in paid and unpaid work), and those who govern and control them and the places where they work. Democratic power as envisioned by Rancière has nothing to do with elites politics in the electoral sense and sensibilities associated with representative democracy (May, 2011: 18-19). The power of political elites which is based on their claims to wealth, wisdom or birth is challenged by democratic power (Rancière, 1991: 17). The democratic power of the people is the power of anyone at all to verify their presupposition of intellectual equality, the equality of capabilities to theorise and to think critically. It is not the predetermined power of a particular group within the population (e.g. the workers) (Rancière, 2006, p. 49). Rancière (2006, p. 49) acknowledges that it is the norm for societies to be ruled by those of wealth, wisdom and/or birth, and that democratic power comes into existence, usually in exceptional circumstances when the people seek to limit the power of those having wealth, wisdom and birth. For (Rancière, 2011: 79) "democracy is an egalitarian presupposition" and its critical function is to struggle to insert equality jammed into the mechanisms of domination effected by oligarchic regime of elite politics. Representative democracy is "a system of elections and capitalist economics that revolves around ceding political and economic power to those [of wealth, wisdom or birth] who [proclaim they] know best how to utilise that power [to govern and control those who work]" (May, 2011: 3). Representative democracy is a limited and highly manipulated expression of democratic power of those who are governed and work – as seen in the case of the US elections of November 8, 2016 (Rancière, 1991).

The Ignorant Schoolmaster contains a key proposition advanced by Rancière's (1991) concerning the definition of power, the form of power that involves the verification of the presupposition of the equality of intelligence. Rancière argues against the structural inequality of this equation of power and knowledge as misleading, because it tends to kill the democratic process at the same time as he pretends to enlighten it. The citizenry is divided in those who have the knowledge, and thus those who are entitled to command power, and those who lack the knowledge and must therefore obey those with power. The problem for democracy is that those who use their expert knowledge become a tool of power to silence those said to lack knowledge. The point of democracy is that anyone and everyone are entitled to the power of ruling for no other reason that that they are one of the people.

A Rancièrian teacher provides opportunity, contexts, situations and structures through which their students' power to learn finds chances to be actualized. In other words, teachers help their students by removing the obstacles that separate them from their own power to learn and generate knowledge, rather than providing them with what they lack, whether it be knowledge, understanding, intelligence, or power. Rancièrian democratic power consists in producing or in exploiting the practical conditions - contexts, situations, structural frameworks that will solicit students (and teachers) to use the intelligence and power they have. Rancièrian democratic power involves setting in motion or fuelling a practical verification of the equality of intelligence. That is, democratic power is a process through which all participating agents find out for themselves how their conditions of living might be improved.

Rancière (1991) recognises the people exercise an active power of intelligence, engaging in forms of interpretive activities which trigger operations of attention, selection, retention, anticipation, retrospection, translation, adaptation.

Methodology

Analyses of the research literature in the field of service learning have become increasingly important as this field of research has expanded in the research methodology, research settings and perspectives. In particular, such analyses provide a means of bringing theoretical coherence to this field of research. They also provide researchers with an indication of the state of research in this field in terms of scholarly debates; identify blind-spots requiring closer investigation, and thus suggest questions where researchers might investigate to make new contributions to knowledge.

This study uses the method of systematic review of literature on service learning (Bland, Meurer & Maldonado, 1995), and indicates its replicability, reliability, and trustworthiness. The following procedures were carried out:

1. Retrieving research literature through the use of Proquest and Google Scholar search engines for the period 2005 – 2016 on the topic of power and service learning, knowledge and service learning.
2. Rating the research reported in literature for quality, which means only refereed journal articles, book chapters and books but no conference papers or research theses, professional magazines or general guidebooks in service learning were included.
3. Identifying that subset of the research literature found of sufficient quality to be considered for in-depth reading based on seminal works.
4. Searching for direct quotations of these three key concepts.
5. Coding the quotations to identify and sequence key themes and then annotating high-quality references using a synthesis matrix (Klopper, Lubbe, & Rugbeer, 2007).
6. Using Rancierian theoretical framework for analysing the literature.

A key step in the method for undertaking this meta-analysis of the research literature on service learning was to generate a synthesis matrix (Klopper, Lubbe, & Rug beer, 2007). In this synthesis matrix, arguments presented in the literature of knowledge and power were systematically coded (labelled) and categorized. The first column was used to record the names of each of the researchers (data sources) while the second one offers direct quotations relating to main points of argument on each of these topics.

Findings
Knowledge from Service Learning: Dependence and Independence

Instead of taking for granted that SL helps students improve both their understandings and capabilities to deal with circumstances in real world, there is more to address the kind of knowledge, forms and status of such knowledge in SL in the society. Whether the knowledge offered and obtained is a kind of fixed model in the curriculum or matching the needs of the served and the servers due to the political nature of the partnership or network between institutions and community. More concerns need to be clarified for the student empowerment in changing their roles for proactive and critical learners through community service activities. Knowledge is both dependent and independent in terms of power relations.

That knowledge is influenced by the teacher's authority questions the existing SL programs. This type of power influence causes students' dependence on knowledge which they should be empowered and able to gain through participating in service learning.

"… there is the traditional method of teaching and learning dominated by the teacher's authority and power. Knowledge is transferred by and from the teacher to the students, who remain passive recipients" (Deeley, 2015: 45).

The knowledge in prevailing SL is disconnected from student empowerment, which may not enlighten the learning potential in each student in traditional teaching and learning due to the teacher's authority and power. Knowledge is like the granting rather than the reciprocity of both parties involved in the knowledge conveyed and generated. What critical service learning is trying to do is offering students the authority of their knowledge obtained and the opportunities to contribute to knowledge to the community and society. They also have chance to enhance their transferable skills (Jones, 2013) which are the focus of the knowledge given in service learning.

One of the positive outcomes in service learning is the knowledge produced along with students' learning agency which means their capabilities to act.

"… challenge themselves beyond their comfort zones in unfamiliar scenarios, and establish strong community ties: learning is multi-dimensional" (Gibson et al, 2011: 293).

The knowledge explored in SL is student learners' agency (Mercer, 2012) in their capabilities to deal with unexpected situations in the real world. This knowledge empowers students to make their own decisions in their study and life. The knowledge gained in SL helps changing the misconception that students are passive knowledge recipients. Students' knowledge is clarified by students taking charge of their study through SL "… ownership of their knowledge and understanding because they had been actively involved in its construction" (Deeley, 2015: 172). The knowledge here is interrelated with democratic power in which students find themselves responsible with their study and make their voice raised and heard. Students are the recipients but also the knowledge producers of their education journey. They may choose the kind of knowledge they wish to gain. They are entitled and make their efforts to do so. SL also brings students the knowledge from many dimensions through the disciplines students are studying, the actual institutionalizations, the active involvement, students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992), and their meta-cognitive abilities (Robinson, 2012).

Knowledge is not the process of passive understanding; this process is getting students' involvement independently and making their contribution to the community as the product of serving and learning process.

"service learning is a pedagogical strategy in which students engage in community service that will enhance their understanding of course concepts and enable them to make contributions to their communities" (Warren, 2012: 56).

Knowledge from SL is shaped by both students' proactive commitment and willingness to contribute to community development by partly changing community attitudes or awareness. Students may not realize the value of this kind of knowledge nor be aware that they are a part of making the world change. Service learning, hence, challenges the institutionalisations in the way that knowledge is no longer for one-way transferring.

Rather, the interactive knowledge recipients tend to make a transformation in that experiential learning process.

Knowledge may be explored through the joining the discussion of diverse cultures. This is a process of knowledge discovery from knowing more than one culture.

> "Active, first-hand experiences with diversity enabled students and conversation partners to exchange cultural knowledge" (Gross, & Maloney, 2012: 195).

Knowledge is a part of cultural identity originates from languages. Variety of cultures allows knowledge contribution through cultural exchange. SL offers knowledge from interactive conversations in which students of diverse cultures share what they know and what they lack when being involved in community activities. Diversity in cultural contexts enables students' understanding of what cultures can add a part of their local knowledge which may be unique. The concept local knowledge is not from among countries but regions of any particular country when students join in any SL program. This links to equality education where students of diverse cultural background offer a part of knowledge generation.

Students' independence in obtaining knowledge in Service Learning is a process of self-management through engagement and exploration.

> "… the process of service-learning is characterized by reflection, discovery and acquisition of skills and knowledge through experience rather than rhetoric" (Said et al, 2015: 473).

The notion of knowledge has changed from students receiving what they are offered to having more authorities. Students in service learning are in the driver seats of their journey driving from planned and oriented departure towards to scholar destination. They learn, cogitate, find out what they gain or fail, self-manage and control their understanding.

Power Nature and structure in Service Learning

Power needs investigation in how an education system arranged and relationship among stakeholders in service learning.

Power nature is both known and unknown, which may be explored in teacher's superiority and connected to educational targets and curriculum.

> "Despite attempts to create a democratic classroom, a power relationship between the teacher and students cannot be eradicated where the teacher is responsible for the curriculum and factors such as educational aims, intended learning outcomes, and assessment" (Deeley, 2015: 43).

Once the teacher is still in charge of pedagogies and institutionalisations, it may be very hard to create democratic power in learning environment. They have the power of making key decisions on offering knowledge and getting their students involved in what they are supposed to learn.

Power is also revealed as structure of education system reflected in the performance of institutionalisation.

> "Education can serve the interests of the individual, the state, or both. Invariably, one takes precedence over the other, and this largely depends on which political party is in power at any given time and the nature of its education policies" (Deeley, 2015: 58).

Power presents itself in how teaching and learning takes place and how service learning participants are treated. The power may affect the benefits of the stakeholders in service learning program as well as the knowledge given to students who are the initial focus of this educational approach.

Power balance is essential reciprocity among stakeholders in service learning. However, the power between teachers and students and community staff that creates reciprocity is ignored in SL.

"Many of these programs do not always achieve the reciprocity they strive for" (McMillan, & Stanton, 2014: 65).

The nature of power resides in the service learning enactment. Some programs fail to achieve the reciprocity that should be in the educational approach. The reason for this may start from student empowerment, then the common voice between the students and the community and then the collaboration between institutions and the community.

Identifying power necessitates addressing the roles of stakeholders for promoting the intellectual equalities in service learning programs.

"The critical approach re-imagines the roles of community members, students, and faculty in the service-learning experience. The goal, ultimately, is to deconstruct systems of power so the need for service and the inequalities that create and sustain them are dismantled" (Mitchell, 2008: 50).

Analysing the power system in critical service learning requires revaluing the roles of stakeholders in service learning. The idea is to see how democratic the learning environment through community serving is. In doing so, the first attention is paid to the servers and the served in service learning activities.

The power that needs focussing is the power for the ones giving services and the ones receiving services. Targeting power that each stakeholder has may help driving the society towards democracy and social justice.

"Without looking at access to social power and the role of power (or the lack of power) in determining who receives service as well as what services are provided, the potential of using service-learning as a pedagogy that brings society closer to justice is forfeited" (Mitchell, 2008: 56).

Power may have been ignored when implementing service learning programs. The practice can be from the ideology that serving is the students' tasks while learning without caring and clarifying their roles and status in the learning process and their contribution to the community.

Power needs more clarifications from what is meant by student empowerment.
"Students became empowered through the process of service learning" (Gross, & Maloney, 2012: 194).

Traditional teaching and learning approach challenges the student empowerment. Power is given to students indirectly in service learning through learning from serving the community. However, power is not clearly defined in service learning. More questions of what type of power the teacher should have and what power should student maintain in SL need addressing..

Discussion

As noted, Rancière's (1991) educational philosophy is complex. The following interrelated aspects of his ideas on equality of intelligence are spelled out drawing on the guidance provided by Citton (2014).

Findings on literature of service learning point out the intellectual inequality as shown in student's dependence on teachers' knowledge included in the institutional protocols reflected in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment thereby generating intellectual inequality. For Rancière (1991: 39), a basic educational principle for service learning might be the "equality of all speaking beings"; that is "everyone is of equal intelligence" (Rancière, 1991: 101). Students are defined "as a will served by an intelligence" (Rancière, 1991: 51). While there may be "inequality in the manifestations of intelligence … there is no hierarchy of intellectual capacity" (Rancière, 1991: 27). There is a big question to deal with equality of intelligence when the literature review also shows that there are possibilities for students to produce knowledge through serving. The equality of intelligence here does not imply that "all intelligence is equal" (Rancière, 1991: 46). Those who develop tests of students, productivity performances regimes for academics, promotion scales and ranking schemes for universities are determined to measure and make manifest something supposedly resembling intellectual capacity (and only intellectual capacity). They do so, claiming that their agendas are to present equality as a goal for the future, even while admitting that their measures mean it can never be an achievable goal. In contrast, Rancièrian equality of intelligence is a premise that drives the democratic power of service learning.

Intellectual equality is a point of departure for service learning, "a supposition to maintain in every circumstance … not an end to attain" (Rancière, 1991: 138). In other words, intellectual equality is considered as a premise for any service learning informed by democratic power. This premise about intellectual equality is taken as a presupposition to be verified through the practice of teacher and students, and is treated as a goal which can be not postponed to be attained in the very distant future. The presupposition of equality of intelligence begins with students making a self-declaration, "As speaking – languaging - beings, we declare our power and consider ourselves equal in intelligence to those deemed superior, and we have the will to verify this premise" (Citton, 2014).

The literature of service learning in this paper foregrounds democratic power while neglecting the enabling or constraining power of the 'police order.' In service learning, democratic power consists in the practical verification of the presupposition of equality of intelligence. That is to say, that equality of intelligence "it is practiced, it is verified" (Rancière, 1991: 137–8), it is neither taken as a given, nor is it just asserted. Equality of intelligence only exists through its actual verification and it has to be verified always and everywhere, otherwise it does not exist (Rancière, 1991: 137–8). This means that the verification of the presupposition of equality of intelligence has to be made manifest through multiplying the experiments that are inspired by this premise (Rancière, 1991: 46). However, the point of these student-willed investigations "is seeing what can be done under that supposition [rather than] proving that all intelligence is equal" (Rancière, 1991: 46). Thus, the educational value presupposition of equality in service learning is limited just to the effects achieved through practical investigations and (theoretical) reflections created through attempts at its verification. The deferment of equality into a never-to-be realised future constitutes a major failure of any service learning program. For instance, in terms of theory and critical thinking, that proposition is that students from Asia must submit our (lower) intelligence to the West's (higher) knowledge and understanding of today so that in the future you may be equal, by learning Western theory and modes of critical thinking. Such service learning is based upon the "principle" of inequality of

intelligence, and it perpetuates the intellectual inequality – the division of intellectual - it supposedly promises to eliminate. Since the equality of intelligence cannot be observed as such in its given manifestations.

Limitations

This paper is but a preliminary exploration of the literature of knowledge and power in service learning. The framework provided by Rancière's (1991), work focusing on a detailed systematic, analytical review of the research literature dealing specifically and directly with knowledge and power is not being tested yet.

Recommendations

Questions requiring further investigation include whether and how service learning might function to democratize power through its "pedagogy, research, organizational learning, and community development" (Swords & Kiely, 2010: 148). What might be done in many service learning programs that "do not always achieve the reciprocity they strive for" (McMillan, & Stanton, 2014: 65)?

Presupposing the equality of intelligence leads to investigations into the intelligence at work in service learning. This includes the types, levels, intensities, qualities, and therefore the value of the operations generated by learning experience. These can vary widely from the most conventional to the most transgressive.

Conclusion

This paper has opened up the possibility for exploring research into service learning using a different lens, specifically Rancière's (1991) unusual conceptualisation of knowledge and power. With the analytical literature review of service learning, this study raises an issue of having an appropriate agenda for service learning programs. This is due to knowledge in the forms of both "dependent" and "independent" for students in service learning as a result of institutionalisations and intellectual inequality caused by power in such institutionalisations. Understanding service learning does not entail explaining it from a position of superior knowledge and authority. Service learning enactment, therefore, needs a framework with investigation for verifying the presupposition of equality of intelligence in which power is not disregarded.

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