

Human Subjects Protection: A Source for Ethical Service-Learning Practice

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Human subjects research ethics were developed to ensure responsible conduct when university researchers learn by interacting with community members. As service-learning students also learn by interacting with community members, a similar set of principles may strengthen the ethical practice of service-learning. This article identifies ethical concerns involved when service-learning students enter communities and draws on the Belmont Report and three research methodologies invested in responsible university interaction with underserved populations—decolonial, feminist, and participatory—to offer a set of guidelines for practicing ethical service-learning.

Service-learning practitioners enjoy relative freedom in their interactions with the community; partnerships are bound primarily by practical concerns, community desires, and principles of good practice. I became accustomed to this unrestricted interaction through years of nonprofit and service-learning work, so when I decided to collect data and write about the service-learning program I coordinate, I experienced a culture shock when faced with human subjects protection protocols for a community-based research project. The university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) required a 14-page form about my proposed interactions with the students and community members that participate in the high school-college partnership program I planned to study. I had to obtain site approval from school and district officials (who required additional paperwork of me), script my recruitment talk, and produce lengthy consent documents for students and parents. This formalized process took more than four months. The level of review seemed unnatural because the activity proposed, asking participants their opinions of the program, is a routine practice for service-learning administrators and teachers. Yet as the review process caused me to change my research plan to ensure community members did not feel pressured to participate in the study, my perspective shifted. I began to recognize problematic ethical issues present in my previous service-learning teaching, and wondered if the service-learning community might benefit from additional tools to help instructors explore ethical issues in their community engagement work.

Service-learning classes often engage in activities that would be deemed highly problematic when viewed through the lens of human subjects protection. Community members may be told—not asked—by

nonprofit organizations to interact with service-learning students, service-learning students may work with children sans parental notification or consent, and information about community members may be shared freely in class written assignments and discussions. An online search for service-learning blogs, for example, brings up several student reflection papers that discuss community members' first names, locations, and diagnoses or personal problems.

Despite the potential harm inherent in some aspects of service-learning, the field has established few formalized principles for protecting community members such as those for protecting human research subjects. The earliest principles of good practice developed by the service-learning community offer the foundations for ethical engagement with community members. Sigmon (1979) championed community voice and empowerment in his three core principles: (a) those being served control the services provided; (b) those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; (c) those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned. The Wingspread principles (Honnet & Poulson, 1989) offered additional guidelines for responsible interaction with community members, such as allowing people with needs to define their own needs. And service-learning's fundamental principle of reciprocity has promoted mutuality in service relationships, wherein the goals of both the community and university are met and both sides participate in the design of the program (Rhoads, 1997).

While these principles offer beautiful end goals such as mutuality, community voice, and empowerment, they may need to be augmented with more specific conceptual tools to help university service-

learning instructors analyze ethical issues in service partnerships. In particular, these principles of good practice may not adequately help instructors recognize the potential harms of service-learning, allowing some problematic practices to slip through the cracks. While some scholars have recently begun addressing this gap by developing recommendations and codes of conduct for responsible interaction with the community (Chapdelaine, Ruiz, Warchal, & Wells, 2005; Schaffer, Paris, & Vogel, 2003; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009), our field has important work to do in further clarifying and minimizing potential harms involved when service-learners are hosted by community partners.

In this article, I propose that the human subjects research protection tradition may inform the field of service-learning about principles for ethical community engagement. First, I offer a rationale for developing a set of principles in the tradition of human subjects protection and outline the touchstone concepts of research ethics contained in the Belmont Report. As these principles were originally created for medical experimentation ethics, it would be appropriate to adapt them for the different context of service-learning. To guide such an adaptation, I introduce three research methodologies—decolonizing, participatory, and feminist—that specialize in work with underserved populations, as these approaches have a tradition of modifying the Belmont principles for community work. Informed by the Belmont principles and the three methodologies, I propose a set of principles for the ethical practice of service-learning, and discuss how these principles can be applied to service-learning pedagogy. I conclude by exploring next steps to ensure ethical practice in service-learning. While I am by no means calling for a formal review of service-learning projects, it is my hope that this set of guidelines may prove useful to service-learning instructors and coordinators planning projects as well as to those training instructors in service-learning pedagogy.

The Rationale for Ethical Guidelines in Service-Learning Practice

Why might the service-learning community benefit from a set of ethics guidelines similar to human subjects research principles? This suggestion may seem counterintuitive, as the Belmont Report (1978) defined research as contributing to “generalizable knowledge” that can be published, presented, and applied in other contexts (p. 3)—a different enterprise than what happens in service-learning. From the university perspective, service-learning and human subjects research are clearly distinct—one is about student learning and one is about knowledge generation.

However, when we consider the community member’s experience, it becomes apparent that service-learning and research on communities may be similar. In both, people affiliated with a university are interacting with community members with the goal of learning—about community members, nonprofits that serve them, etc. In both cases, community members are observed and information is collected, sometimes formally as in research and sometimes through friendly conversation as in service-learning, and this information is analyzed through an intellectual lens. In both cases, community members are written about, either in student papers or research articles. With both research and service-learning, the problems that can arise are similar, from community members feeling pressured to participate, to inappropriate sharing of sensitive information, to interactions that do not follow cultural norms for respect.

From the community perspective then, there may not be much difference between the student working on a service-learning class assignment and a researcher working toward a publishable article. In fact, some service-learning assignments mirror scholarly community-based research methods, including conducting focus groups, surveys, and participant-observation (Lewis, 2004; Reardon, 1998). When such community-based research projects are undertaken by scholars, human subjects review is a foregone conclusion, given the potential harms to community members. Yet regardless of whether a university student or researcher is involved, or whether what is learned from/in the community will be published in a scholarly article or a student reflection assignment, do we not have comparable ethical responsibilities to the community members?

Research Ethics as a Source for Service-Learning Ethical Principles

If service-learning practitioners are responsible for considering ethical principles in their practice, it makes sense to look to the “bible” of human subjects protection—the Belmont Report (1978).² The Belmont Report was written in response to growing concerns about research misconduct in the medical field, and it provided the basis for a section of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, now called the “Common Rule” because it has been adopted by grant-awarding federal government agencies in their regulations of research. The Belmont Report presents three key ideas guiding human subjects protection: respect, beneficence, and justice. The Report describes respect for persons in two parts: “first, that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and second, that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection” (p.

4). Beneficence, the second principle, requires that research must maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms for human subjects. Justice, the third principle, is defined as “fairness of distribution” in who bears the burdens of serving in research trials (p. 8). These three principles drive human subjects protection in research.

However, several research ethics scholars have suggested that the Belmont principles are ill-suited to community-based research, especially as the concepts are currently applied by Institutional Review Boards (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006; Shore, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Problems with these principles may stem from their origin in biomedical sciences, an area of study dedicated to clinical, experimental models, which is a very different context than relationship-driven, collaborative community work that requires constant attention to shifting power dynamics and nuanced cultural codes. Therefore, these principles need to be adapted in order to be applied to service-learning contexts.

To modify these important Belmont Principles, I draw from decolonial, feminist, and participatory research methodologies. I use these frames because they have rigorously critiqued and reenvisioned human subjects review to ensure respectful interactions with underserved community members. Because most service-learning students work with underserved populations, and as almost all university-community partnerships involve some degree of power imbalance, we can learn much from these methodologies.

Decolonizing methodologies largely derive from the work of indigenous research scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who recognized the significance of indigenous perspectives on research. Tuhiwai Smith builds from an analysis of the problematic history of research on indigenous peoples to offer suggestions for alternate ways of producing knowledge. Although the term “decolonizing” may be understood differently in different contexts, Tuhiwai Smith uses the term to acknowledge the ongoing power imbalances faced by indigenous communities in and beyond research contexts. She identifies the need for continued exploration of the “different approaches and methodologies that are being developed to ensure that research with indigenous peoples can be more respectful, ethical, sympathetic, and useful” (p. 9). This approach seeks to reflect critically on the theories and methods of data collection, interpretation, and writing so as to promote justice for the underserved groups being researched.

Feminist methodologies have been influenced by feminist science studies, a subfield that grew in the 1970s from the intersections of post-positivist science studies and women’s movements (Harding,

1987). Feminist science studies seek to examine how scientific inquiry functions, turning the scholarly eye toward the process of research itself, focusing on the power relations involved in research and the ways scientific inquiry is influenced by culture. Feminist methodologies thus strive to promote approaches to research that are attentive to social inequality, welcoming of alternative epistemologies, and accepting of personal relationships with research participants.

The third approach, participatory action research, has been defined by Brabeck (2004) as “an enterprise that engages researchers and community members as equal participants; combines popular, experiential knowledge with that of an academic, ‘rational’ perspective; and seeks to join community members in collective action aimed at radically transforming society” (p. 43). Participatory action research, centering on the inclusion of research subjects as co-leaders of the research project, stems from both Majority world theorists involved in community development and Western scholars and practitioners of organization theory. Together, these three research methodologies can help us adapt the Belmont principles to ensure the ethical practice of service-learning.

Principles for Ethical Service-Learning Practice

Respect: Moving Through and Beyond Informed Consent

The Belmont Report defined respect as the acknowledgement of people’s autonomy and the protection of those with limited autonomy. This translates to the need for informed consent, wherein research participants receive detailed information about the proposed project, and then formally agree to participate, usually by signing a consent form. Respect also means that participants should not feel forced into the project in any way, and that they are not “unduly influenced” to participate through substantial incentives, such as a large stipend, that may encourage them to overlook important risks (p. 14).

While this understanding of respect and informed consent is a solid starting point for ethical service-learning practice, a few tweaks informed by decolonial, participatory, and feminist methodologies may help us optimize this concept for community contexts. I suggest the following adapted definition of respect for ethical service-learning practice:

Stakeholders are offered a culturally-responsive and revisable explanation of the project, without coercion. Consent is continually renegotiated—in relationships. Respectful, asset-based frameworks guide interactions and representations.

For service-learning instructors, informed consent of community partners would require offering a clear

explanation of the project before it begins. This process bears similarity to Gust and Jordan's (2007) "Community Impact Statement," a document created in preparation for community/university partnerships that addresses issues such as ground rules for decision-making and the responsibilities of each party. Modeling the process on IRB-approved informed consent documents might suggest specific information to include: (a) learning outcomes, duration of the proposed partnership, and description of activities; (b) foreseeable risks and benefits to nonprofit staff or community members; (c) how confidentiality of information gathered at the organization will be handled; (d) whom to contact with questions or concerns; and (e) assurance that participation is voluntary.

Participatory, decolonial, and feminist methodologies offer additional suggestions for ensuring that the informed consent process is appropriate for community contexts. First, informed consent is most effective when it is culturally-sensitive. As participatory action researcher Blake (2007) noted, working with formal contracts, especially those that require signatures, may be uncomfortable or alienating for some community members. Depending on the context, teachers may want to consider more informal and culturally-appropriate ways to ensure expectations about the project are clear, such as a verbal contract or an informal email. Participatory researchers also suggest that informed consent be amendable, so service-learning instructors might actively negotiate with community members about expectations for the project, rather than presenting a finished contract for signing.

Furthermore, while it may be tempting to seek informed consent from nonprofit organization staff, decolonial scholar Tuiwai Smith (1999) has emphasized the importance of obtaining consent from all important stakeholders in a project. With service-learning, stakeholders might include not only the community partner staff but also the community members with whom the students will be interacting and parents if children are involved. Community members could be informed ahead of time when students will be coming, what activities are planned, and what alternatives are available if the community members do not wish to participate or have their children participate, thus offering them the choice to consent or decline.

Finding reasonable alternatives to interacting with service-learners is crucial for avoiding coercion or undue influence of community members. For example, if students will be serving lunch and eating with residents at a homeless shelter, we would not want hungry residents to feel coerced to participate with the students. The residents could be given the option to opt out of engaging with the students, which could be done by designating areas of the room for residents

wishing and not wishing to interact with the students.

Concerns about coercion or undue influence may also apply to faculty interactions with nonprofit staff. Bell and Carlson (2009) discovered that many nonprofit staff feel pressured to participate in particular projects out of fear that they may not be invited to future service-learning partnerships. Thus, Bell and Carlson suggested that university representatives clarify during the partnership recruitment phase that the decision to participate or not would not affect future invitations to participate.

All of these suggestions are useful for obtaining informed consent at the beginning stage of a service-learning partnership. However, participatory researchers would suggest that the work of informed consent does not end when the partnership begins. While informed consent in research is often considered a one-time event where participants sign away control of the data and input into interpretations, participatory researcher Blake (2007) suggested continual renegotiation of informed consent. Teachers can set up periodic check-ins with community partners to see how the partnership is progressing. This type of dialogue about the partnership works best within the context of a personal relationship with the community partner, an approach identified by Reinharz (1992) as essential to many feminist researchers, and echoed by service-learning scholar Cushman (2002), who argued for instructors to establish long-term relationships with community partners before bringing students into the dynamic.

The notion of genuine relationships with community partners sets the stage for the most significant difference between respect in the human subjects tradition and respect in community work: the explicit emphasis on general respect for people. As participatory researcher Shore (2007) argued, obtaining a consent form and ensuring uncoerced participation does not guarantee that community members are treated with respect. In fact, decolonial scholars have noted that much university discourse about underserved populations follows a disrespectful, deficit model, pathologizing problems these communities face and contributing to degrading stereotypes (Tuiwai Smith, 1999). Service-learning instructors can facilitate respect by using frameworks such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), articulated by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), as a strategy that "starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area— not with what is absent, or with what is problematic, or with what the community needs" (p. 8). ABCD does not ignore problems, but uses a community's strengths to address its weaknesses. Teachers can introduce ABCD to students and encourage class dis-

cussions and reflections that include positive aspects of the communities where students work.

This adapted version of respect may present challenges, as it requires much more negotiation with community members and critical reflection with students. Yet respecting community partners, in the fuller sense of the word, lays the groundwork for a deeper application of all of the Belmont principles.

Beneficence: Whose Benefits, Whose Risks?

Beneficence is characterized in the Belmont Report with two general rules: “(a) do not harm and (b) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms” (p. 6). In practice, this means that researchers conduct an analysis of the possible benefits and harms to the research participants, and ensure that the risk of harm to the human subjects is minimized.

As part of an analysis of potential harms, researchers consider risks related to privacy (how data is collected) and confidentiality (how data is stored and shared). IRBs are especially concerned with identifiable data that might allow the participants to be recognized, so researchers often protect participants’ anonymity.

This concept of beneficence can be adapted for service-learning:

Projects benefit both the university and community. Potential harms are rigorously considered and minimized, including harms related to collecting and sharing community data.

With service-learning, the application of beneficence begins with a hard look at what both parties of the partnership are gaining and losing from the relationship. It requires that teachers actively seek to determine community impact, rather than relying on the assumption that service is always inherently “good.” Service-learning instructors can choose from a variety of tools and approaches to determine the risks and benefits to the community. For example, Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring and Kerrigan (2001) created an assessment matrix that helps service-learning coordinators analyze community perceptions of student service. Participatory evaluation is another approach that calls for community members themselves to take the lead in assessing benefits and harms. Alternatively, informal conversations with community partners can bring to light important positive and negative aspects of service-learning partnerships and projects.

When analyzing benefits and harms of a service-learning partnership and project, there are several areas of risk to consider: emotional harms (e.g., could the temporary nature of affective relationships harm community members, especially children who form bonds with students?); human resource harms

(e.g., what are the time and money costs to the non-profit for hosting, training, and supervising students?); service harms (e.g., how might the non-profit’s clients be negatively impacted by students acting in roles traditionally assumed by trained professionals, such as social workers, professional writers, or teachers?); program harms (e.g., how might programs be disrupted if students prove inconsistent in their service?); and privacy and confidentiality harms (e.g., how might the collecting and sharing of information about clients hurt them?).

In particular, instructors may wish to address risks related to privacy and confidentiality, a topic not frequently discussed in service-learning contexts, but one that has substantial ethical implications. Privacy relates to what information can be recorded from community members, as information is best taken respectfully and non-intrusively. Teachers may wish to clarify privacy expectations with students before the first site visit, including what kinds of questions are and are not appropriate to ask community members, and what observations can and cannot be recorded in reflections, journals, or ethnographic notes. IRB regulations on privacy suggest that information not be collected from people who do not have reason to believe they may be observed, so it may be inappropriate for students to write notes from overheard conversations or private documents (Hicks, 2008).

Instructors might also consider a policy for photography, another method of data collection. Photography is an act of representation that can be profoundly political. Consider, for example, the ways indigenous peoples have historically been photographed to emphasize their “otherness” (Sweet, 1994); parallels might be found in students who take pictures that capture the most “ghetto-looking” scenes or pictures that illustrate harmful stereotypes. A specific photography policy can be negotiated with the community partner before service begins, but it would be advisable to have a minimum guideline that students never take pictures of community members without explicit consent of the people photographed (and parental consent if children are to be photographed). It may be better to avoid photos altogether, given the complexity of representation involved and the ways photography can resemble poverty tourism or emphasize power differences between students (as the photographers) and community members (as the passively photographed). When students do wish to use photos, they might consider handing the camera to the community members as a way to equalize some of these power dynamics—a technique used by participatory researchers such as Wang (1999).

Confidentiality, the protection of data obtained, is also an important ethical dimension related to service-

learning. In particular, students must be advised against sharing names or other identifiable information and instead use pseudonyms in their reflection assignments so community members' personal struggles, diagnoses, or thoughts that were shared in confidence have no chance of being traced back to them. Instructors can adjust confidentiality policies for different forums, as where the information is shared will affect what guidelines are appropriate. For example, class discussions allow for more open sharing than reflections circulated in a class publication. Though some instructors like to post service-learning reflections on the Web, publicly searchable text may require extremely careful handling of community members' data, and perhaps it is best for service-learning blogs to be hosted on private networks. Aside from the discomfort or embarrassment that comes from having personal information made public, overstepping confidentiality boundaries can have real consequences for community members. Consider, for example, the potentially crucial nature of confidentiality for clients of a battered women's shelter, an AIDS testing clinic, or an LGBTQ center. Nonprofit staff may also be concerned about public reflections that paint them or their organizations in a negative light.

Yet as participatory action researchers have explained, we do not wish to pursue confidentiality to the point where we cannot recognize community members for their positive contributions to our work. When researchers Cammarota and Romero (2008) wrote about their community project, they attributed particular ideas to research participants by name as a way of honoring the community's intellectual contributions. Flower (1997) followed a similar approach as a service-learning instructor: college students and urban youth collaborated to produce documents, and both groups were recognized as authors. There are various approaches to participant recognition and confidentiality, and the best strategy may be for faculty, community organization staff, and community members to discuss the most appropriate method.

Justice: Addressing Micro- and Macro-Cosmic Dynamics

Institutional Review Boards understand justice as specifically pertaining to the selection of research subjects. This principle grew out of the tendency for researchers to recruit underserved populations to participate in difficult research trials, with the benefits of this often flowing to privileged groups. Therefore, the IRB requires "justice" in subject selection—populations historically vulnerable to exploitation by researchers are not to be involved in research studies unless there is a strong justification.

Yet, for service-learning practitioners interested in social justice, this definition may feel thin. Many ser-

vice-learning practitioners follow Rosenberger (2000) in the larger goal to "create a more just and humane society" through our work (p. 24). Therefore, I offer an adapted version of the justice principle for service-learning:

Partnerships demonstrate attention to power dynamics and attempt to equalize them, including the micro-dynamics of the partnership as well as the macro-dynamics in society at large.

This definition is informed by participatory and feminist research practices, which expand the concept of justice beyond traditional IRB consideration of subject selection. When Shore (2007) interviewed participatory researchers, she found that many reinterpreted the Belmont principle of justice to include "a focus on equitable research processes" (p. 15). This augmented understanding of justice involves leveling the playing field between the researcher and the researched as much as possible. As feminist researcher Reinharz (1992) wrote, "The people studied *make decisions* about the study format and data analysis. This model is designed to create social and individual change by altering the role relations of people involved in the project" (p. 181).

Applied to service-learning, justice then impacts the decision-making processes of the partnership; the community as well as the university representatives together co-determine the projects and logistics and negotiate the ethical dilemmas. This power-sharing does not happen automatically, especially given, as Flower (1997) noted, the ways that university knowledge is often valued over community knowledge. Service-learning instructors will need to actively work to include and respect community perspectives. Holmes (2009) presented one model for shared decision-making in a project that invited a team of community and student representatives to collaborate in redesigning her service-learning course.

Justice also extends, for many teachers and participatory researchers, to the aim of the project itself: Is the project offering a band-aid solution or seeking to contribute to "transforming society" to become more just (Brabeck, 2004, p. 43)? Kahne and Westheimer (1996) differentiated between a justice and charity orientation to service-learning, arguing that the charity orientation can gloss over systemic inequalities and present the solution to problems as individual acts of kindness, rather than advocating and working for social justice. A justice orientation to service-learning would work to situate the service in a larger context of social forces, helping students understand and address the root causes of pollution or homelessness rather than only discussing individual explanation for social problems.

An emphasis on justice, therefore, can have impli-

cations for the selection of service-learning partners. Some nonprofits provide needed services, but they are not interested in or may not be equipped to interrupt oppressive cycles on a macro-cosmic level, or even to work with clients in a participatory manner (e.g., having a community member advisory board). Faculty can choose to collaborate with community organizations that actively address root causes of social problems and/or strive to enact power-sharing practices among clients and staff. Selecting these types of organizations for a partnership not only aligns faculty with the principles of justice, it also teaches students a version of service that includes intervention in micro- and macro-cosmic social inequalities.

Yet not all nonprofits interested in hosting service-learning students are justice-oriented, and Morton (1995) has argued that working with nonprofits that follow a charity model can also provide justice-oriented service experiences for students, especially when the charity follows the “thick service” approach of deeply valuing the inherent worth of another human being. Ryder (2010) built upon this argument to make a case for introducing students to a variety of nonprofit organizations, not just advocacy organizations, to teach strategies for engaging with multiple civic orientations. Service-learning instructors choosing to work with nonprofits that do not have a justice orientation may therefore choose to interpret the principle of justice slightly differently than the description above, focusing on the micro-dynamics of the partnership rather than also the macro-dynamics of society (see also Mitchell, 2008).

Reflexivity: Position and Perception

While reflexivity is not mentioned in the Belmont Report, many community research methodology scholars assert that this concept is crucial for responsible research (England, 1994; Nicholls, 2009), and I believe this principle is also important for responsible service-learning. As Finlay and Gough (2003) wrote, reflexivity “requires critical self-reflection on the ways in which researchers’ social background, assumptions, positioning, and behavior impact on the research process” (p. ix). In other words, applied to service-learning, reflexivity means:

Teachers and students demonstrate awareness of how who one is shapes one’s perceptions of the service-learning situation, including recognizing that one’s viewpoint is not absolute.

Feminist scholar Harding (1987, 2008) has unpacked the significance of reflexivity. In *Sciences from Below*, Harding (2008) explained that traditional research stems from modernity’s belief in the possibility of objectivity. The ideal of objectivity does not recognize how forces beyond pure rationality, such as cul-

tural norms, shape the process of inquiry, impacting what counts as an important question to pursue or what can be considered valid data. Objectivity also overlooks how social location influences what we perceive and how we interpret our data—researchers with different backgrounds may view the research processes and findings in different ways. Pursuing objectivity leads us to what Haraway (1984) has termed the “the pretense of being able to see everything from nowhere” (p. 581). Instead, feminist researchers espouse “situated knowledges,” the idea that our background shapes what and how we know, and “partial perspective,” the recognition that we do not have a complete view of a situation (p. 583). Acknowledging situated knowledges does not lead to relativism, where all “truths” are equally accepted. Rather, reflexivity calls for us to take into consideration how our background and inclinations affect our interpretations, which helps us avoid “unlocatable, and thus irresponsible, knowledge claims”—including irresponsible knowledge claims about ethics (p. 583).

Reflexivity becomes an especially powerful tool in community interactions, given the clash of cultural expectations and the variety of perspectives at play. Researchers occasionally engage in community work believing their values and methods are objectively good, when in fact their ideas are linked to particular cultural positions. For example, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) described how research ethics principles stem from a Western worldview, though this link is not often recognized, and the principles are sometimes applied without consideration for indigenous contexts. The principle of respect for persons requires informed consent by individuals, a requirement steeped in Western concepts of individualism. Responsible research ethics in many indigenous contexts would require communal consent; tribal leaders must first approve research on behalf of their people. A researcher (or international service-learning instructor) practicing reflexivity would talk to tribe members to determine how to proceed ethically, gathering other perspectives in recognition of the limitations of the university perspective, rather than assuming that the principle of individual informed consent is objectively ethical. Reflexivity encourages us to trace the situatedness of our ethical knowledge, and the implications of this situatedness.

This principle, therefore, sets the stage for a certain humility in interpreting service-learning ethics. Though we may consider a certain activity to be respectful, beneficial, or just, a community member might not. In applying the ethical framework I have outlined in this article, reflexivity invites us to be attentive to the limits of our view and to solicit the perspectives of others who experience the community-university partnership from different positions.

Reflexivity also serves as an ethical tool for students, helping them make more responsible knowledge claims in reflections and class discussions. Scholars such as Erickson and O'Connor (2000) have noted the possibility that service-learning may contribute to students' stereotypes of various underserved groups, stereotypes which are then disseminated when students share with others about their service. Service-learning instructors can help students self-reflect on where these interpretations came from, and how cultural messages and past experiences (or lack of certain experiences) might be impacting their viewpoints. Reflexivity may thus help students analyze their service in more nuanced ways, promoting more ethical representations of community members, in addition to supporting instructors in negotiating community partnerships.

Implications for Applying Ethical Service-Learning Principles

Together, the aforementioned adaptation of the Belmont principles, along with reflexivity, comprise a proposed set of ethical guidelines for service-learning. Figure 1 summarizes these principles, including questions that guide their application. Service-learning teachers may wish to bring these guidelines to planning meetings with community partners, use them as a heuristic during project brainstorming or assessment design, or share them with students to spark discussion on the ethical complexities of service. Service-learning offices might find these principles useful for training faculty and students on responsible engagement and/or orienting community partners to service-learning.

In whatever context they are applied, my suggested use of these principles differs from their enactment by IRBs: instead of a formalized process for instituting each principle to its prescribed standard, I suggest an informal, flexible reflection on the principles by service-learning instructors and coordinators. Limiting factors will include time, space, and institutional support; and particular contexts will require that the principles be reshaped for local needs and resources. Applying these principles in service-learning requires that we follow the spirit rather than the letter of the law, with both a realistic eye toward logistical possibilities and an idealistic eye on the overarching goal of creating healthy, ethical collaborations. It is important to remember that as with any ethical principle, the ideal is unattainable, and the application is fluid.

For example, in the service-learning program I direct, a partnership that pairs high school and college writing classes, we have worked with the Belmont principles as flexible goals. We have made great gains in the area of reflexivity, initiating an advisory com-

mittee of both high school and college teachers that guides development of the program, and we actively incorporate suggestions from our evaluation team of high school students, in recognition of the limitations of university perspectives on the program. However, in terms of informed consent, while we now inform high school students of the partnership ahead of time and send home a bilingual summary of the project, we are unable to offer alternatives for high school students who may not wish to interact with college mentors. Such alternatives would require that the high school teachers create a full alternative curriculum, which is logistically impossible. After analyzing the situation, we decided we had to let go of that aspect of the respect principle. As this example illustrates, though the application of the proposed set of ethical service-learning principles will never be perfect, service-learning instructors may make substantial ethical improvements by striving for the ideal.

As we do so, we work to define a new kind of human "subjects" protection, one focused on collaboration with community members rather than mere protection. While the human subjects protection tradition has long worked to ensure more responsible and respectful interactions with the community, feminist researchers such as Brayton (1997) have noted that this tradition is also connected with tropes that may amplify power imbalances. Consider, for example, the concept of a human "subject." Labeling a person as *subject* of scientific inquiry interpolates the participant as a specimen, passive under the researcher's eye. A focus on "protection" also marks the participant as inactive and vulnerable, needing the benevolent protection of the researcher—a very different approach than the asset-based and empowering models championed by service-learning. Yet with a vision of research ethics adapted by participatory, decolonial, and feminist methodologies, the community members play an active role in negotiating the ethical dynamics of the partnership. We end with an understanding of a human subject that more closely resembles Freire's (2007) conception of the term. He wrote: "Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality... The integrated person is person as *Subject*" (p. 4). The adapted Belmont principles thus may have the potential to help us move, tentatively and however slowly, toward a more ethical engagement with human Subjects.

Notes

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Figure 1
Principles for Ethical Service-Learning Practice

| Principle | Belmont Definition | Adapted for Service-Learning | Questions for Service-Learning Instructors |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| Respect for Persons | <p>“First, that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and second, that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.”</p> <p>Application: Informed Consent</p> | <p>Stakeholders are offered a culturally-responsive and revisable explanation of the project, without coercion. Consent is continually renegotiated—in relationships.</p> <p>Respectful, asset-based frameworks guide interactions and representations.</p> | <p>What agreement of expectations for each partner will precede the project, and how will this agreement include community perspectives? What kind of consent (formal, informal, written, or verbal) is most suited to your context? How will your relationship with the community partner be cultivated? How will you ensure consent from all stakeholders (parents, site leaders, community leaders, clients, etc)? How will clients be informed before the project, and how will you ensure that they are not unduly influenced to participate? Will there be an alternative offered to those not interested in participating? How will you clarify with partners that they will still receive future invitations if they decline participation in this project? How will you use and teach an asset-based framework with your students?</p> |
| Beneficence | <p>“(a) Do not harm and (b) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms”</p> <p>Application: Risk/Benefit Analysis, Privacy and Confidentiality Protection</p> | <p>Projects benefit both the university and community. Potential harms are rigorously considered and minimized, including potential harms related to collecting and sharing community data.</p> | <p>What are the benefits for community partners? How is the partnership perceived by the community? What assessments will determine community impact? How will you analyze possible harms: emotional (temporary or inappropriate affective relationships, especially with children); resource (time and money to host, train, and supervise students); service (negative impact by students who act in roles normally reserved for professionals); program (disruptions from inconsistent service); and privacy and confidentiality (unwise collecting and sharing of client data). How will you negotiate a privacy and confidentiality policy, including photography guidelines, and communicate policies to students? In what forums will information about community members be shared, and how does this affect confidentiality? How will intellectual credit be balanced with confidentiality?</p> |
| Justice | <p>“Fairness of distribution” of research burdens</p> <p>Application: Fairness in Subject Selection</p> | <p>Partnerships demonstrate attention to power dynamics and attempt to equalize them, including the micro-dynamics of the partnership as well as the macro-dynamics in society at large.</p> | <p>How will decisions be shared between university and community representatives? If you follow the critical approach to service-learning, how will you align the project with justice rather than charity? How will you situate the project within larger social forces for students? How will you choose community partners that strive for larger social equality and/or power sharing between clients and staff, to model a justice orientation for students?</p> |
| Reflexivity | N/A | <p>Teachers and students demonstrate awareness of how who one is shapes one’s perceptions of the service-learning situation, including a recognition that one’s viewpoint is not absolute.</p> | <p>How does your background impact your perception of the partnership’s ethical dynamics? How will you solicit a variety of perspectives on ethical issues? How will you teach students to consider their positionality when interpreting service-learning experiences?</p> |

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¹ Method, methodology, and epistemology are three interrelated terms that are often conflated when discussing research. In this article, I follow Harding's (1987) distinction between the terms: "A research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence;" "A methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how 'the general structure of theory finds its application in particular scientific disciplines;" "An epistemology is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower'...what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge...what kinds of things can be known...and so forth" (p. 2). In this work, except where distinguished, I am most often discussing "methodologies," because I am pulling from theoretical analyses of how research should proceed.

² Readers may be wondering why human subjects protection has not previously been applied to service-learning pedagogy. I see two possible reasons. First is a false sense of security stemming from the word service, leading to the perception that no protection is needed for community participants of service-learning. The second reason lies in the history of how human subjects ethics were developed. Human subjects protection began as a response to horrific medical experiments, such as the infamous Tuskegee Study, a project that studied syphilis in low-income African-American men by intentionally withholding the cure. The extension of human subjects protection from medicine to the social sciences and humanities was contentious from the beginning, coming about primarily through "bureaucratic turf-grabbing," as Schrag (2009) argued (p. 29), rather than through sustained discussions on the impact of social science and humanities research—or, I would add, discussions with community members about university interaction. The resonance between service-learning and research may have been apparent had research ethics been initially driven by broad concerns about university involvement in the community rather than biomedical ethics violations.

³ See Brunner and Guzman (1989), "Participatory Evaluation: A Tool to Assess Projects and Empower People," for a helpful overview.

⁴ Data is collected for various purposes in service-learning projects, from improving serving to a particular person (e.g., writing prompts that motivate a certain child), to assessing a program (e.g., a staff member's perspective on how students can better interact with community members), to illustrating class concepts (e.g. pieces of a community member's life story that align with a course reading). The nature of the data collected is just one aspect that must be considered when reflecting on the ethics of data collection.

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