



Growing Citizens Inside and Out:
*How Sustained Group Reflection in the Context of Service can Deepen
Civic Identity and Engagement*

The Project on Civic Reflection

December, 2009

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Preface

The report you are about to read is the fruit of a yearlong collaboration among three parties: the Kettering Foundation, New England Campus Compact, and the Project on Civic Reflection. Together, in 2009, we pursued an experiment to find out whether a specific form of reflective group discussion, anchored in the exploration of literature, deepens civic engagement when integrated into service activities in colleges and universities. The result? **Reflective literature-based discussion proved to be an essential tool for deepening students' understanding of, and commitment to, civic engagement.**

“Civic reflection” is the shorthand term—the handle of sorts—which my colleagues and I at the Project on Civic Reflection have attached to this literature-based method of reflective discussion. In a civic reflection discussion, people engaged in common community work (say, as members of a service program, nonprofit board, giving circle, or civic association) set aside regular time, in the midst of their activity, for facilitated conversation with one another about fundamental questions related to civic engagement—questions like: *What is justice? What motivates us to serve, and what do we expect from those we serve? Why give to one cause and not another? What is a good community?* Short, thought-provoking readings from literature, philosophy, history and religion anchor the discussion. A trained facilitator asks interpretive questions, inviting participants to articulate and examine their beliefs and values, explore the claims of the reading, and consider the implications of self, text, and context for the larger challenges of citizenship and service.

Since the Project on Civic Reflection began in 1998, with founding support from the Lilly Endowment, we have been working in partnership with state humanities councils and other organizations to develop this unique model of reflection and foster it in a wide variety of civic settings. Along the way, we have been identifying best practices, creating needed resources, capturing impacts, and sharing learnings with our partners and the general public through publications, presentations, and an online resource center at www.civicreflection.org. Our goal simply put (if not simply achieved!) is to deepen civic engagement in America by fostering meaningful reflection; we believe that the humanities have much to offer in this regard. American democracy needs engaged citizens—but equally, we need citizens who engage with vision and wisdom, who actively connect the present to the past and the future, who ask fundamental questions about their experience. The humanities can help cultivate these capacities in ourselves and our fellow citizens, if integrated into civic life. In fact, consistent evaluation of our work has shown that reflective humanities-based discussion can provide people with clarity about their values, greater connection to their co-workers and fellow citizens, and a deepened commitment to engagement in civic life.

Our greatest success to date has been in the national service movement. In particular, the practice of civic reflection has been picked up by AmeriCorps programs through a national initiative, the Meaning of Service, which was administered by the Illinois Humanities Council in partnership with the Project on Civic Reflection, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. At this writing, AmeriCorps members in at least 16 states have participated in civic reflection discussions. In Ohio, every AmeriCorps member now participates in civic reflection discussions as part of their service experience. The result,

according to the director of the Ohio Community Service Council, has been a noticeable increase in member retention and satisfaction.

In 2009, we expanded our work with civic reflection into a second major arena of the movement for civic engagement: the arena of higher education. We entered into a shared learning agreement with the Kettering Foundation to support a pilot with selected partners in Campus Compact . Through this pilot, the Project on Civic Reflection worked with the state offices of Campus Compact in New England and Pennsylvania to implement and evaluate civic reflection discussions for diverse constituencies (students, faculty, staff) in their member institutions, in order to assess the impact of civic reflection on these audiences, and at the same time to gain insight into student understandings of citizenship and democracy. Facilitators distributed opening and closing reflective exercises to participants before and after their series, allowing evaluators to assess changes in attitude among discussion groups. In addition, the closing reflective exercise posed additional questions about the impact of the discussion series on participants.

The following report on this data speaks capably for itself, and I won't keep you from it much longer. Here I just want to pull out a few highlights and to reflect in closing on one theme in particular. As a result of these discussion series, we saw the following impacts:

- **Most students moved from a relatively superficial and conventional understanding of the meaning of service to a much more complex and internalized perspective.** In particular, they broadened their definition of service and began asking fundamental questions about its impact on themselves and others.
- **The majority of participants also emerged from these discussions more committed to service**—expressing a desire to continue it in a more thoughtful or intentional way. This change was often expressed as finding a way to push beyond typical constructs of volunteerism.
- **Participants connected more deeply to peers and colleagues.** The discussions gave participants “a structure and a reason” to listen both to themselves and to one another. As a result of this listening, people began to understand and connect in a deeper way. Participants acknowledged that learning about one another was not always comfortable or pleasing, but repeatedly observed that this knowledge was a source of personal growth.

Taken together, these findings point toward a larger, obvious but overlooked truth: namely, that when people have the opportunity not just to engage in civic life but to mull over the meaning of their civic experiences, in conversation with one another and with the deepening aid of the humanities, they grow inside and out—building inner connections even as they grow outwardly in community and commitment.

A similar pattern of personal growth is suggested in the data on students' understandings of citizenship and democracy. The report notes a “heightened sense of the immediate and personal implications of being a citizen or being part of a democracy.” As with service, so

with citizenship: the discussions appear to have moved participants from simple, technical definitions of these ideas to personal connection and lively curiosity.

Finally, there is one more related theme in the data that struck me upon re-reading this report—yet more evidence of growth both “inside and out.” As a result of these discussions participants began to think about their service activity in terms at once *larger* and *smaller*—to ask big-picture questions about the social causes and impacts of service activity, and at the same time to attend more closely and intentionally to other persons in their midst. Compare, for example, the following two observations:

I now realize [service] can be as small as holding a door, making eye contact or smiling.

I am asking more life-altering questions and challenging myself to make choices that are synchronized with justice, equality and acknowledgement of my own privilege.

Both forms of attention appear again and again in deepened form in the reflections of participants: attention to other persons (including peers and colleagues) and attention to underlying questions about society.

This dual attention both to persons and to questions seems to me to be the form of attention we *most* need to cultivate, in ourselves and our fellow citizens. We need, after all, a world in which people notice and care for one another not just through organized service but in an integrated daily way, as colleagues, neighbors, strangers in the street. And we also need a world in which the same people follow out the thread of their experience to ask larger questions about the way society works (or doesn’t), and to engage actively with one another in finding solutions.

If we want to cultivate such a world, it will never be enough to encourage engagement alone. We need to encourage more and better “mulling” as well. We need, in short, to cultivate civic reflection alongside civic action—and, as this report suggests, the humanities can and should be called upon to help.

Elizabeth Lynn
Executive Director
The Project on Civic Reflection

I. Introduction

In January 2009, the Project on Civic Reflection entered into a shared learning agreement with the Kettering Foundation to support a pilot with Campus Compact in the New England states and in Pennsylvania. Through the pilot, the Project on Civic Reflection worked with these state offices of Campus Compact to implement and evaluate structured literature-based discussions about service for diverse constituencies in higher education (students, faculty, staff) . The goal of the project was 1) to probe the uses and limits of this form of reflection, which we call civic reflection, for deepening civic engagement in higher education settings, and 2) to gain insight into student understandings of civic engagement.

To launch the pilot, the Project on Civic Reflection (PCR) conducted a training workshop for facilitators who had been recruited by participating Campus Compact offices. Following the training, facilitators returned home to launch discussions for audiences within Campus Compact member institutions. PCR then followed up with the groups to offer ongoing support and to conduct an evaluation of the effort.

This evaluation report, therefore, attempts to answer the key research question posed by the pilot: Can civic reflection discussions deepen civic engagement in higher education settings? If so, how? To answer this question, evaluators from the Project on Civic Reflection distributed both an opening and closing reflective exercise designed to elicit participants' thoughts on the meaning of their service and their role in a democratic society. In addition, participants were asked to reflect on which elements of the civic reflection experience were most meaningful and why.

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that **civic reflection discussions are indeed capable of deepening civic engagement in higher education settings**. In their closing exercises, participants reported feeling increased clarity about the meaning of their service, and improved relationships with their colleagues in service. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, **participants reported feeling a stronger sense of commitment to engaged citizenship after participating in civic reflection discussions**.

Context and Methodology

The Project on Civic Reflection and New England Campus Compact launched their pilot in January of 2009 with a two-day training of 23 facilitators at the New Hampshire Campus Compact offices. Many of the facilitators were staff from campus civic engagement or service programs (10); the remainder included Campus Compact state office staff (7), faculty (4), or staff from student affairs (1) or other departments (1).

The training, led by Elizabeth Lynn, executive director of the Project on Civic Reflection, and Georgina Dodge, assistant provost at the Ohio State University, focused on equipping facilitators to conduct discussions about the meaning of service by using a poem, short story or essay as the launching point for conversation. This form of reflection is increasingly used by national service programs such as VISTA and Americorps. For a more complete description of the Project on Civic Reflection and its approach to reflection, please see Appendix A.

Following the January training, facilitators returned home to launch discussions for audiences within Campus Compact member institutions – students, faculty, AmeriCorps members. The facilitators and Campus Compact offices had latitude in choice of audiences and readings. Facilitators were expected, however, to conduct a series of at least three discussions. The majority of facilitators met this expectation and in some cases exceeded it. For a full roster of programs, including facilitators and type and number of participants in each group, please see Appendix B.

In order to collect data on the impact of these discussions, evaluators from the Project on Civic Reflection distributed an opening and closing reflective exercise to participants in each discussion series. These reflection tools asked participants to articulate their thoughts on citizenship, democracy and service both before and after the conversation series. In so doing, the exercises served as a pre-test post-test research tool that allowed evaluators to assess changes in attitude among discussion groups. In addition, the closing reflective exercise posed additional questions about the impact of the discussion series on participants. (See Appendix C for Opening and Closing Exercises.) Of the 15 groups that met for discussions, 13 groups returned responses to the opening exercise (n=150 discussion participants), and 13 groups returned responses to the closing exercise (n=92 discussion participants).

Finally, to augment the data from participants, facilitators were asked to complete a final survey about their experience in the discussion series. All 15 facilitators completed this exercise.

Evaluation Questions

The framing research question for the pilot initiative was the following: *Can civic reflection discussions deepen engagement in higher education settings, and if so, how?* Specifically, PCR and its Campus Compact partners wanted to learn whether or not civic reflection could lead to the following **outcomes**:

- new and deeper connections with other participants or those served
- exposure to different perspectives and values
- the opportunity to explore and question values and beliefs
- a greater understanding of community work and service to others
- new civic leadership skills.

We also sought answers to the following **process** questions: What factors within civic reflection have the most impact? How are conversations influenced by:

- use of literature
- type of group
- setting
- civic engagement experience of the participants
- type of facilitator

In addition, our research partner the Kettering Foundation was especially interested in learning how students are thinking and talking about citizenship and democracy. To this end, we used the opening reflective exercise to do an initial survey of participating students' thoughts on these topics. (For a summary of the findings from the opening exercise, see Appendix D.) To understand how the discussion series impacted the students' thinking on citizenship and democracy, follow-up questions on these topics were embedded in the closing reflective exercise.

This report will take up the outcome questions first, focusing on the benefits realized by participants. We will then turn to the process questions to explore which elements of the conversations were most critical in making a difference. Finally, we will turn to the data on citizenship and democracy to see how the discussions may have impacted participants' thoughts about these two complex ideas.

II. Outcome Findings

It is evident from the collected data that **civic reflection is an effective tool for deepening civic engagement in the higher education setting**. Whether used with faculty, staff, or students, the civic reflection process allowed participants to explore the meaning of their service at a level of depth they had not reached before, and they emerged from the exploration with a more nuanced and personalized sense of connection to community and a deeper commitment to engaged citizenship in the future. As one participant observed:

These seminars made me feel like more of an engaged citizen than I did before because I thought more about what it really means to be "engaged". Although I didn't really change anything that I've done since the seminars, I view my role as a citizen differently. I think that most of the time, those who are the most involved in making change (both in their own lives and in their communities) have a hard time actually seeing the work that they are doing. Now I am able to look more at my projects and activities and see their impact on a larger scale. I am better able to see my role in my community and to see ways that I can improve my skills to become a better community leader and to help my students become leaders as well.

To understand what it means to deepen civic engagement, it is helpful to look closely at several of the specific outcomes examined by this evaluation. In brief, it appears that civic engagement deepens when people have the chance to explore, question and often reaffirm their beliefs and values as these relate to service. Moreover, a chance to come to know others, while examining one's own beliefs, can lead to a deeper sense of civic engagement.

But how do we know civic engagement is actually deepened? Perhaps the best evidence for this change is the large number of participants who expressed having reaffirmed their commitment to continuing service. Not only did these respondents indicate a desire to continue service, but **many expressed a desire to continue their service in a more meaningful way**.

The report will now explore these findings in turn, looking first at the data regarding change in clarity about values and beliefs and then turning to the data regarding improved relationships with others. Finally, we will look closely at what those who expressed a deeper commitment to service are saying.

Understanding Values and Beliefs

“[The conversations] opened up my thinking on what can be considered service.” – Civic Reflection Discussion Participant

The opening reflective exercise asked participants to reflect on their service in relationship to their concepts of citizenship and democracy. While the other reflective questions in this opening exercise drew thoughtful answers from participants, this particular question rendered little information. Most participants simply listed the service in which they had been involved and noted in some way that they were “trying to help others.” On the whole, participants had very little to say about the notion of service when these conversations first got under way.

It is particularly notable, then, that the closing reflective exercise was full of deep, nuanced and complex thought on the concept of service. In particular, participants had the chance to reflect on their definition of service and their relationship to those they serve.

The discussions appeared to help participants broaden their operating definition of what it means to be of service to others. Some participants came to understand smaller acts of kindness as part of service. As one person commented, “I have learned that service does not have to be only active. It can involve discussion, and just being present, sitting and listening with someone.” In the words of another participant, “I still think [service] is an important part of life, but I now realize it can be as small as holding a door, making eye contact or smiling.” One wonders whether these deeper perceptions of service as acts of being present to other people emerge in part from the experience of the discussions themselves, which encourage participants to sit, listen and attend to one another. In other words, not just the texts discussed—but the manner of discussion—may help communicate this fundamental value.

Interestingly, even as they began to perceive small gestures as acts of service, participants also began to see their service work within a larger context – asking questions about social change or leadership development. As one participant noted, “I am always wondering what the best way to serve is, whether serving directly or trying to change the system. In the future I guess I would like to do both...” In the words of another participant, “My thoughts on citizenship and democracy [have] helped me realize where service is needed and what kind of service a leader can do to make a difference.”

Participants had a chance to reflect on their relationship to those they serve. On the whole, most participants who acknowledged change in this area came to understand the reciprocity of service – the idea that the server is benefiting from the act as well as the person being served. For many, this was a new idea. As one person noted, “I think about my volunteer work as having just as much of an effect on me as it does on the people I am helping.” This insight, in particular, may be crucial to deepening and sustaining long-term engagement.

Other discussions raised difficult issues of what we need from our relationship with those we serve. As one participant commented, “I always viewed service as a way of giving back. This discussion has pushed me to look at why I serve. I was shown the reality that I serve because I feel as though people need me.” While this participant appears to have come to

some resolution about this idea, others left the discussions still challenged by the notion. The following quote illustrates this struggle:

While I have never thought service to be simple, I don't want to believe that those who promote and carry out service-based activities desire inequality. We discussed this point at length during the first session and I remember feeling like I was the most naïve person in the room. This feeling was both humbling and troubling. How could we desire inequality? One of my colleagues in the session pointed out that it makes us feel good to be in a position of power over others in need. But I still wonder – does it?

The end of this line of inquiry left the participant not wanting to leave service but rather to think about how to “instill in my students that, while there is an inherent us/them in most sectors, service should not be utilized as a new form of oppression.”

These comments are striking not just for the thoughts they reveal, but also for the intensely personal nature of these thoughts. The participants are not repeating lessons they have been taught (what might be called transactional learning) but are instead describing new ways of seeing (what might be called transformational learning) and uncovering “live” questions they will carry forward into their continued service.

At the same time that the discussion series was helping people explore their relationship to those served, it was allowing them to begin to know their fellow discussants in a deep and complex way. The following section will examine this interpersonal benefit for participants.

Understanding Others

“I am listening a lot more closely to what people are really saying.” – Civic Reflection
Discussion Participant

In their closing exercises, pilot participants reported that the discussion process helped them connect them to their peers in new and different ways. Of note, **70% indicated that they now relate differently to fellow classmates or colleagues.** Of this 70%, the vast majority indicated improved relationship.

A closer look at this finding reveals complex dynamics at work. The discussions gave participants a structure and a reason to pause and listen to one another—to be present to one another, as noted above. As a result of this listening, in turn, people began to learn one another's stories and therefore understand and connect in a deeper way. Participants were open about the fact that learning about one another was not always comfortable or pleasing, but repeatedly observed that this knowledge was a source of personal growth.

Regarding listening skills, participants were grateful for the opportunity to hear from one another. In the words of one participant,

I am attending Grad school in downtown Philadelphia. Although I grew up outside the city, my experience was very different from some of my classmates who grew up in rougher sections. I have begun to ask better questions to hear from their civic experience and to learn what actually IS in the world, not just my reality. This will continue to shape my understanding and the way that I see my ongoing civic responsibility.

Still others commented that their listening skills had improved. As one participant noted, “I have more empathy and patience when it comes to listening and understanding my colleagues.” In the words of another, “[I now] consider other points of view. [I am] more open-minded and compassionate.”

This opportunity to listen, in a quality way, to the stories, beliefs, values and concerns of others created a space in which relationships could form and deepen, even when the immediate connections were not evident. As one participant observed, “I found more common ground with the participants of the discussion than I thought was there.” This idea was seconded by a participant who was “learning to step out of my skepticism of what others have to offer – find[ing] common meeting points.” Occasionally, this common ground gave way to real connection and even friendship. As one participant noted, “We all feel closer and it’s easier to talk about because we all did service.” In the words of another, “I feel more a part of a ‘group’ of folks who are committed to this work.” Still another student observed, “At the beginning of the semester I felt out of place, now I feel much more comfortable and have made some good friends.”

While these instances of connection and deeper relationships did occur, the more common pattern in the data was that surprising and differing viewpoints were raised and allowed by the larger group. As one participant commented, “Everyone has their own reason for doing what they do. I may not always agree with that reason but I should take that into consideration.” This kind of openness often led to participants talking about their own personal growth, as in the following example.

I didn’t realize how some of them [fellow discussants] had such different ideas of what volunteering can do for people. I think that some have a lot of growing to do and others are way ahead of me in their process of verbalizing what they think is right.

Here, another participant recounts their experience with personal change as a result of hearing from others.

I have always couched service within my faith and so I was perplexed to see others who would not claim the same faith and yet would serve others from an internal motivation. It’s not that I didn’t know it was happening, I just didn’t know too much of what it looked like. I’ve also been thinking through my arrogance as it relates to service: examining my white privilege eyes and being thankful for the opportunity that others allow me to serve them.

Deepened Commitment

“[These discussions] have encouraged me to perform more service and caused me to reflect on the real reasons I do it.” – Civic Reflection Discussion Participant

The personal growth resulting from examining their own beliefs and the beliefs and values of others, in the context of these conversations, appears to have manifested in an increased commitment to service among participants. In their closing exercises, **77%** of respondents reported thinking differently about themselves as volunteer and/or engaged citizen, and **64%**

report thinking differently about service. (NB: Of the 36% who responded that they were NOT thinking differently about service, the vast majority indicated that the discussions had simply reaffirmed their existing beliefs or commitment.) Most importantly, our emerging data shows that **the majority of participants are thinking more deeply, and in a more committed way, about their service** – many expressing a desire to continue it in a more thoughtful or intentional way.

When asked directly about how their thoughts on service had changed, a large majority indicated that they were looking to change the **quantity** of their service – to make an additional or continued commitment to service. As one participant stated, “I am on the look-out for other ways to serve the community in my free time beyond my commitment to my VISTA position.” Another participant expressed, “I will be a more committed member of the service world by not only participating more but volunteering more.” And another commented, “[I am] looking forward to making service an everyday part of my life and hopefully starting a student org at UNH based on service.”

For others, the conversations led them to think about changing not only the quantity of their service, but the **quality** of it. This sentiment was expressed by a participant who commented, “I believe it is my duty to serve as much as possible. Although I do need to think about whether or not my service is actually helping or hurting.” This change in quality for participants often means finding a way to push beyond typical constructs of volunteerism. This concept was captured by one respondent who observed, “I’ve clarified that I am not interested in volunteerism. I’m interested in engagement.” Another participant described the change in their thinking about service as a move from being “less ‘success’ based and more needs based. Less super-hero and more just being present.” As these very different comments suggest, participants were moved in different directions by their common conversations—reflecting, again, the depth of learning, the internalization and ownership of insight, by those involved.

The shift into a deeper, higher-quality engagement is perhaps best captured by one participant who was led to critically examine the way that their campus’ service learning program operates. After a discussion of a piece entitled *What We Don’t Talk About When We Don’t Talk About Service* by PCR staff member Adam Davis, this facilitator questioned the intricacies of student motivation, current methods of placement, and how best to match students with opportunities that deepen their sense of community.

While I often question my students’ motives for doing community service, I was always strongly under the impression that if they just got out there and did a service project, then they could be “hooked” into doing it for the rest of their lives. After examining and discussing the motives in the Davis article, I saw that there is a big difference between what motivates students to do service and what motivates citizens to do service. Students are basically motivated for two reasons: 1. I have to do it for class. 2. I want to do it for “good”. I think that the biggest difference in these two reasons is “I want” and “I need”. Many of the students who come into my office need to do 2-6 hours of volunteering for a class (typically wellness) and they want no clearances or anything with training or an application. This is easy enough to find (hoping that they have cars, of course) but those students who want to do service on their own, typically are much more willing to go out of their way to get security clearances, or to go through a training process or to even take the bus to get to their destination. They have a much less “entitled” attitude about how they will do their volunteering and they are willing to put the effort into giving back. I think this has a

lot to do with Davis' five reasons that people serve... I now also put a lot more effort into finding volunteering opportunities for students that best fit their skills and abilities rather than just something that I know is coming up. Hopefully, by making better matches with students and community service, we will be able to be more of a "hook" to the community rather than a chore that needs to be completed a week before the end of the semester. Overall, I think that forcing students to volunteer when it is not a personal priority (intrinsically driven, as we discussed) can do a lot of harm by teaching them that community service is a chore that you have to do against your will. The fact that many of these service opportunities may not be for all students, however due to time and availability, many students find themselves volunteering at places that don't best utilize their abilities and skills. This is something that we are facing here at Millersville with an impending service graduation requirement. Although the university is generally accepting of this proposal, I am now worried that this may be doing more harm to the university community than good. This is an aspect of this requirement that I hadn't thought of before I read the Davis article and attended the reflection seminar and I am grateful for having this new perspective when I meet with students and match them up with community service.

In sum, it appears that the civic reflection discussions helped people better understand their own values and beliefs about service, better relate to those they work alongside, and ultimately feel more committed to the work. This deeper commitment expresses itself as a desire to serve more, and to serve better. Moreover, these changes in perspective, impressive in themselves, seem to go deeper because the participants arrived at them not by being told, but through a process of reflection and patient conversation with others.

Given these findings, it is important to look closely at the factors that may have produced these outcomes. We will now turn to what we learned about the most impactful elements of the civic reflection discussions.

III. Process Findings

As noted in the introduction, the partners in this initiative were interested not only in whether or not the discussions produced the desired outcomes, but also in which circumstances or settings allowed for the most successful discussions. The following section will explore the elements that participants found most valuable.

The Value of Group Reflection

To begin with, it is important to note that the simple act of pausing to reflect in the company of others was affirmed by many participants as an important way of giving meaning to their service. As one participant commented, "Just talking about [service] with people and seeing others having a shared experience similar to yours brings it all alive and makes it seem worthwhile." Another person exclaimed, "There needs to be a balance between service and reflection. This is key!" In the words of a third, "I think reflection after doing service is a crucial part of the learning experience."

One participant related the following story about the way that the civic reflection process had helped her to pose deeper questions to other groups engaged in service.

On an alternative spring break trip to Texas, I challenged the good-natured and community-minded students to reflect on their service. The students worked hard painting a 1950s house trailer that had not been in good shape prior to its near destruction during Hurricane Ike. What impact are we having? Who benefits more from this service: ourselves or the people we're serving? If we would have donated the money we spent flying, eating, and living in Texas for a week, would it have gone further? The students had thoughtful and well-reasoned answers to these questions. I don't think we would have likely had this conversation without my (and AmeriCorps VISTA Rachel Dingman's) participation in the civic reflections.

As this suggests, participants were able to carry the practice of reflection into other settings.

Key Factors in Successful Discussions

Participants were asked to reflect on which elements of the discussion – text, facilitation, ideas raised, comments from others, or a combination of factors – were most impactful for them. While “ideas raised” garnered a slightly higher response than the other factors, no single factor emerged as singularly important in creating a successful discussion. Below is a breakdown of the numbers:

- Ideas Raised (61)
- Comments from Other Participants (59)
- Texts (46)
- Facilitation (41)
- A Combination of Factors (26)
- Other (2)

This data was corroborated by the facilitators we surveyed. When asked what had made the conversations meaningful to them, they too ranged widely in their answers:

- Engaging students in meaningful debate and discussion; watching them engage and grow. (4).
- Connecting deeply with participants (4).
- Hearing and/or discussing a surprising range of perspectives.(4)
- Engaging with literature. (3)
- Learning more about the civic experiences of participants. (2)
- Growing as a facilitator. (1)

While this data suggests that the combination of text, thoughtful facilitation, central ideas, and discussion can lead to positive outcomes, comments from participants give several clues as to what was particularly important.

Open Facilitation

Participants affirmed facilitation styles that were especially open and nonjudgmental. As one participant observed, “I really like the openness of the facilitator and how well guided it is.” Another commented, “Although there was facilitator, there was no power dynamic.”

At the heart of this idea of openness seems to be the notion that facilitators created a space in which participants felt free to say what they were truly thinking. As one participant commented, “I was able to open up more in this class. I was able to relate my opinions.”

Diversity

Participants also seemed to appreciate when a group had a degree of diversity and often suggested increased diversity as a way of improving the discussions. As one participant who attended an inter-campus conversation commented, “Interacting with folks from AmeriCorps and other institutions provided perspective outside of the Messiah [name of their college] bubble and understanding.” Another observed, “I think the diversity of campuses added a richness to discussions. It was interesting to learn some issues were shared, and others are unique to institutions.” Still another noted, “The mixed generational nature of the group allowed insights that can help with relating to students.”

When asked how discussions could be improved, participants frequently mentioned increased diversity. “Although it was somewhat of a diverse group (age, economic status, education level, location or background), there were some noticeable gaps in the group who attended. I would have appreciated hearing from more people who are subjected (yes, that’s the word I want) to service on a regular basis. That perspective could have been very valuable to our discussion as we contemplate getting actively involved in serving these people or groups.”

Audiences

This pilot project allowed facilitators at different campuses to use civic reflection with audiences of their choosing, according to what felt most fitting and fruitful in their own context. For some this meant holding discussions among VISTA or Americorps volunteers; for others it meant talking with faculty or using civic reflection in the classroom setting. On the whole, it appears that the discussions did not benefit one type of audience more than another; all, from faculty to staff to students, found it highly beneficial. The group comprised primarily of faculty indicated slightly less “change” in their thinking or beliefs as a result of participation, but they were supportive of the opportunity to reflect on their existing convictions.

Perhaps the one notable finding about audience is that groups who used civic reflection in the classroom context appear to have strengthened the academic experience for students. In one comment, a student directly addressed her professor, stating, “I like your class, Marianne, and think one of the best things you did were these discussions. I really learned a lot and every time returned to my dorm still reflecting and thinking.” Another commented “I appreciate the ‘civic’ forging of the class.” While use of civic reflection in the classroom was only a small portion of the pilot activity, it appears this is potentially an important pedagogical tool.

IV. Citizenship and Democracy

As mentioned above, the Kettering Foundation – a learning partner in this pilot initiative – was interested in learning how students spoke and thought about citizenship and democracy. A review of responses from the opening reflective exercise, administered at the start of the discussion series, indicated that students were likely to think about citizenship in terms of either **being** a member of a community, **having** rights, or **doing** something to engage with the community. As for democracy, students were likely to refer to the act of voting or the notion of “having a voice” in your government. For a more specific and detailed summary of these themes, please see Appendix D.

To ascertain whether the civic reflection discussions had impacted students’ thinking in these areas, the closing reflective exercise contained two questions asking participants to consider whether their thoughts on these topics had evolved over the course of the discussion series, and if so, how.

Many participants indicated that their existing beliefs about citizenship and democracy were affirmed or strengthened through the discussion series, but a significant group indicated that the series had, in some way, changed their opinions. The most salient difference in the pre- and post-exercise answers was a heightened sense of the immediate and personal implications of being a citizen or being part of a democracy. In other words, data indicates that the civic reflection allowed people both to deeply internalize the meanings of these words, and also to ask critical questions about them. In short, it moved them from simple, technical definitions of these ideas, to personal connection and lively curiosity.

A Sense of Immediacy

Many respondents indicated that they felt a personal connection to the ideas of citizenship and democracy after participating in the civic reflection discussion. As one student commented, “I feel that I have earned a closer relationship to citizenship. It has seemed to become more of an understanding to me.” In the words of another student, “I have learned that one part of citizenship involves friendship. It involves getting together, discussing and overall enjoying your neighbor. It involves being active with your neighbor.”

Not only did the notions of citizenship and democracy become both more personal and local, but the conversations appeared to impel people to action. As one student commented, “Democracy should be valued more than many U.S. citizens do in today’s world. This idea urges the involvement of working together and holding up unique ideas to improve society as a whole.” When looking at the larger set of responses from other types of participants (faculty, staff, AmeriCorps/VISTA members), it is clear that the discussions prompted people to think about their actions in a larger context. Consider this quote from a discussion participant,

They [my views] have changed. I am seeing things like equality and love for your neighbor as more interconnected with my thoughts of citizenship and democracy. I realized that there was some hypocrisy lingering about among my thoughts. I am wrestling with what messages I would want to teach my own children and what messages I need to share with the High School students I work with at church. I am also wrestling with how to advocate and fight for people who do not have a voice. I have been given a

voice, and people are listening, but what are the messages I feel are the most important? I find that as a result of these sessions, I am asking more life-altering questions and challenging myself to make choices that are synchronized with justice, equality and acknowledgement of my own privilege.

Another participant noted, “I have begun to examine a deeper appreciation for civic engagement and the opportunities it offers. The discussions alone have allowed for personal reflection in my own work that has enhanced my ability to be more open with volunteers, partners, and those in need. I am able to reflect more with each service opportunity and continue personal growth. There is a deeper independent/personal outcome with each project.”

The Opportunity to Question

As the above quotes indicate, not only did people begin to develop a more personal and immediate connection to the concepts of citizenship and democracy, they also used the discussions as an opportunity to reflect on and question their existing beliefs. As one participant commented, “I have seldom considered how far a citizen’s duty to his/her state should extend. If you choose to live by a country’s laws, are you obligated to submit to the state when the laws do not work in your favor? I’m still not sure how this will affect my actions.”

Similar questions were raised by a second participant who began to think critically about the meaning of citizenship and its relationship to personal belief.

The story about Omelas really made me question what it means to be a citizen. Before the story my idea of a citizen meant being a member of a community and actively participating in it. I still think this is true, but one aspect of citizenship that I had never thought about before was that to be a citizen, you are agreeing to a certain set of beliefs and as a citizen you are expected to uphold these beliefs or ideals. You need to take a look at yourself and determine what you personally believe and see if it correlates with the society you’re in. if not you may find yourself walking away.

Finally, still other respondents indicated that exposure to others’ views and beliefs on these topics caused them to reexamine their own thinking.

In sum, it appears that the civic reflection conversations were an important vehicle for exploring questions of citizenship and democracy. Moreover, the discussions personalized the concepts for students – allowing them the chance to articulate and examine their own relationship to these ideas—which in turn led to a much deeper connection to the ideas themselves.

V. Conclusion

The New England and Pennsylvania civic reflection pilot concluded with a debriefing of Campus Compact directors and Project on Civic Reflection staff in June 2009. At this meeting, the directors reported from their own experience what the evaluation data has confirmed: namely, that the infusion of civic reflection discussions into their member institutions had positively benefited faculty, staff and students alike, deepening their sense of connection to a larger world and to one another. As one director put it, “the role of reflection in service-learning is already well established. But reflection as traditionally understood focuses on learning from experience.” Civic reflection, she suggested, “is not just about learning; it is about building connections.” The directors also expressed hope to see the program continued and expanded through additional facilitation training, especially as a form of faculty development.

As those directors observed and this evaluation report confirms, **civic reflection does indeed seem to be an effective tool for “building connections” and deepening civic engagement in the higher education setting.** Whether used with faculty, staff, or students, the civic reflection process allowed participants to examine the meaning of service at a level of depth they had not reached before, and they emerged from the exploration with a more nuanced and intimate sense of connection to community and a deeper commitment to engaged citizenship in the future.

Project on Civic Reflection

The Project on Civic Reflection (www.civicreflection.org), established in 1998 with support from the Lilly Endowment, helps civic groups gain clarity, community, and commitment through reading and discussion. Since our founding we have engaged thousands of citizens across America in discussing short readings—poems, stories, essays, scripture—as a means of reflecting on basic questions at the heart of their giving, service and leadership.

Civic reflection discussions help donors, volunteers and direct service workers explore their underlying values and motivations for giving and serving. Participants read a short piece of literature as a jumping-off point for exploring questions they rarely can address in the pressure of their day-to-day work, questions like *What do we expect of those to whom we give? Why am I serving these people and not the many others in need? Is service changing me?* Participants report that they go away invigorated by stimulating conversations and new ideas, with a stronger individual commitment to giving and serving, strengthened relationships with colleagues, new resources to draw on, and a fresh perspective on the challenges of their work.

Appendix B

Program Descriptions

Connecticut

- Wesleyan University: Cathy Crimmins Lechowicz, Director of Community Service and Volunteerism, led discussions with student coordinators for volunteer programs.
- Norwalk Community College: Ed Grippe, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, led discussions with a class of 15 students called “*What is Justice?*”
- Quinnipiac University: Vincent Contrucci, Director of the Office of Community Service, led discussions w/ 12 juniors/seniors in the school’s leadership development group.
- Manchester Community College: Kimberly Hamilton Bobrow, Assistant Professor, led discussions with a group of “at risk” students.

Maine

- University of Main at Farmington: Julianna Acheson, Associate Professor of Anthropology, led discussions with students in a Women & Gender Studies class.
- Maine Campus Compact: Maryli Tiemann, Program Director/VISTA Director, led discussions with 15 AmeriCorps VISTA members.

Massachusetts

- Lesley University: Sarah Cantrell, MACC AmeriCorps VISTA Leader, led discussions with part-time AmeriCorps members called *Student Leaders in Service*.
- Massachusetts Campus Compact: Kate Ustach, Program Coordinator, led discussions with 8 faculty and staff of higher education institutions.
- AmeriCorps VISTA: Meghan Callaghan, Coordinator of Community Engagement at Bunker Hill Community College, led discussions with AmeriCorps alumni in Boston area.

New Hampshire

- University of New Hampshire: Marianne Fortescue led discussion with 15 students in a class called *Organizing and Supervising Volunteers*.

Pennsylvania

- Pennsylvania Campus Compact: , Meghan Oakley, Project Manager for VISTA, led discussions with a mix of AmeriCorps VISTA members, and Campus Compact Staff.
- Susquehanna University: Eric Lassahn, Director of Residence Life, led discussions with a mix of students, VISTA members, graduate students, and staff.

Rhode Island

- Rhode Island Campus Compact: Marisa Petreccia, National Service Programs Director, Emily Ustach, Program Coordinator, and Colleen Rost-Banik, Service Learning Coordinator at Providence College, led discussions with AmeriCorps VISTA members.

Vermont

- Champlain College: Ashley George, Service Coordinator, led discussions w/ students.
- Norwich University: Lisa Brucken, Administrative Specialist, led discussions with a mix of students, faculty, community members, and staff.

Roster of Facilitators

Connecticut

Kimberly Hamilton Bobrow, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Division of Liberal Arts, Manchester Community College
Vincent Contrucci, Director, Office of Community Service, Quinnipiac University
Dr. Edward J. Grippe, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Norwalk Community College
Cathy Crimmins Lechowicz, Director, Community Service and Volunteerism, Center for Community Partnerships, Wesleyan University

Maine

Julianna Acheson, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Maine at Farmington
Marin Magat, Citizenship Service Learning Coordinator, University of New England
Maryli Tiemann, Program Director/VISTA Director, Maine Campus Compact

Massachusetts

Meghan Callaghan, Coordinator of Community Engagement, Bunker Hill Community College
Sarah Cantrell, MACC AmeriCorps*VISTA Leader, Lesley University Office of Community Service
Kate Ustach, Program Coordinator, Massachusetts Campus Compact

New Hampshire

Josh Aiello, Service Learning & Community Outreach Coordinator, MA College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Jillian Dahlberg, Program Coordinator, Campus Compact for New Hampshire
Marianne Fortescue, Coordinator, University of New Hampshire, Office of Community Service & Learning
Stephanie Lesperance, Associate Director, Campus Compact for New Hampshire

Pennsylvania

Eric Lassahn, Director of Residence Life, Susquehanna University
Meghan Oakley, Project Manager for VISTA, Pennsylvania Campus Compact
Bonnie Winfield, Director, Landis Community Outreach Center, Lafayette College

Rhode Island

Marisa Petreccia, National Service Programs Director, Rhode Island Campus Compact

Colleen Rost-Banik, Service Learning Coordinator, Feinstein Institute for Public Service, Providence College

Emily Ustach, Program Coordinator, Rhode Island Campus Compact

Vermont

Lisa Brucken, Administrative Specialist, Office of Communications, Norwich University

Ashley George, Service Coordinator, Ctr for Service & Civic Engagement, Champlain College

Melisse Pinto, Associate Professor of Political Science, HGEP (Department of History, Geography, Economics and Political Science), Castleton State College

Appendix C

Opening Reflective Exercise

This conversation series will provide an opportunity for you to discuss concepts such as democracy, citizenship and service with your peers. Please begin by taking a few minutes to reflect on these concepts by answering the questions below. This effort will help us gather insights to inform our program planning going forward.

Are you participating in this conversation as a:

- 1) student
- 2) faculty member
- 3) community partner
- 4) Campus Compact staff member
- 5) Other _____

1. What does the word “citizen” mean to you? What do citizens do?
2. Would you consider yourself an “engaged citizen”? If so, why?
3. Take a minute to consider the definition of democracy. How do you define it?
4. Describe your role in a democracy.
5. Now take a minute to reflect on any service effort you have been or are currently involved in. How, if at all, does this activity relate to your notions of citizenship or democracy?

Closing Reflective Exercise

This conversation series has hopefully provided you with an opportunity to discuss concepts such as democracy, citizenship and service with your peers. Please help us understand the effect of these conversations by taking a few minutes to reflect on the questions below.

- 1. How, if at all, have your thoughts on citizenship and/or democracy changed since the start of this discussion series?**

Which specific texts or discussions played a role in shaping your thinking here?

- 2. How, if at all, have your thoughts on service changed since the start of this discussion series?**

Which specific texts or discussions played a role in shaping your thinking here?

Now we would like to ask you a few questions about the civic reflection discussion experience more generally.

- 3. How many discussions did you attend?**
- 4. For any discussion(s) that were particularly meaningful for you, what made the difference?**

text
 facilitation
 ideas/questions raised

 comments from participants
 other _____
 a combination of the above (please explain below)

- 5. As a result of the civic reflection conversations are you:**

Thinking differently about yourself as a volunteer and/or engaged citizen?

Yes, in the following ways: (please comment below)

_____ No, not particularly (please comment below)

Relating differently to your colleagues/fellow classmates?

_____ Yes, in the following ways: (please comment below)

_____ No, not particularly (please comment below)

Thinking differently about your commitment to service?

_____ Yes, in the following ways: (please comment below)

_____ No, not particularly (please comment below)

6. How could these discussions be improved in the future?

Appendix D

Excerpt from Summary of Opening Exercise Responses – Submitted to the Kettering Foundation in July 2009

To open the Civic Reflection conversations in a reflective spirit, we asked participating discussion groups to conduct a written opening exercise that explored five general questions about citizenship, democracy and service. We have summarized student responses below

Citizenship: Being, Having, Doing

The opening question of the exercise asked respondents to reflect on the meaning of citizenship. Interestingly, answers tended to fall into one of three frameworks:

- citizen as a person who IS something (e.g. a member of a community)
- citizen as person who DOES something (e.g. help others in the community)
- citizen as person who HAS something (e.g. rights and responsibilities)¹

The majority of respondents defined a citizen as someone who “is” – mostly a member of a community. Of those who responded to the question using this framework, it was clear that the community was not necessarily being defined in a formal way. While some used a more formal or legalistic approach to defining the term, “*A citizen is an individual who is legally recognized as a “member of a state”. Meaning that he/she is ascribed the rights of all those who live under the umbrella of the state but does not have the responsibilities of an official of the state, nor the power*” the majority of respondents simply referred to citizens being members of a general community – along the lines of this response: “*Member of a community – participate in some way in that community.*”

The second most common framework used by students to talk about citizenship was the “doing” framework – the idea that citizenship is an active process. The actions associated with citizenship, however, varied widely across responses – with an emphasis on helping others. The following quotes contain a sample of the range of citizen activity:

- *Citizens help create societies. They take part in voting who their leaders should be and how they should work.*
- *To me, the word citizen means being FULLY aware of all of your surroundings and being able to be helpful and responsive to all of those surroundings by trying to continuously work towards a positive environment.*
- *Citizens are people who go about their daily lives. Some are doctors and some work at the local grocery store. All citizens help others, whether consciously or subconsciously. One could help an elderly person carry their groceries or help someone walk their dog. Either way citizens help each other.*

¹ As a reflective prompt, the exercise asked “What do citizens do?” as a follow-up to the first question.

- *The word citizen to me, represents your role in society. A citizen is someone who is amongst the labor force, pays their taxes and somehow benefits the role whether you participate in extracurricular activities or even if you donate your time to help other citizens amongst your society that are struggling or can benefit from your donation.*

The third framework – the “having” framework – was the least cited by the student respondents. And while several mentioned having rights as citizens, the majority of people responding in this way focused on having responsibilities as citizens.

Finally, it is worth noting that a few respondents were able to combine all three frameworks to offer a more complex definition of citizenship. The following two quotes illustrate this more robust definition.

- *Part of a social unit. b. Participate in the formation and development of that body. c. Someone who is entitled to the privileges of that unit. (CL group)*
- *Citizen: A member of a community. With given rights, privileges, and responsibilities to maintain community. Citizen does: Utilizes and upholds their rights, privileges, and responsibilities.*

Engaged Citizens: From Awareness to Action

The opening exercise followed this initial question by asking students to reflect on whether or not they would consider themselves an engaged citizen. Of note, the vast majority of respondents responded affirmatively, stating that they believed themselves to be engaged or somewhat engaged.

Perhaps most interesting about these positive responses was the range of criteria that students used to define themselves as engaged. The most common response was to cite volunteer or service work as a sign of their engagement.² As one respondent noted, “*I am actively involved with various political and social organizations focused on getting and maintaining equal rights for all people. I vote and volunteer on local, state, and national levels.*”

While the majority of students cited their volunteerism or other kinds of community involvement (e.g. coaching a 7th grade basketball team) as a sign of their engagement, a smaller group noted their own daily life or personal self-improvement activity as a sign of their engagement. As one student noted, “*I consider myself an engaged citizen because I go to work and school in order to do better for myself. I go to school so it gives teachers jobs and I work to do service for others. I buy things from stores to give producers money and that’s how the world works.*” In the words of another, “*I am beginning to find myself and am on the path to figuring out how I can contribute to society.*”

While activity within the community was the most commonly held threshold for engaged citizenry, a second significant group of respondents named awareness or knowledge

² This finding is perhaps not surprising given that most students in the discussion groups are active in some kind of community service.

- *Democracy: 1. individuality, 2. Freedom of speech, 3. Freedom of choice, 4. Commitment, 5. Integrity.*
- *Democracy to me means freedom, believing in something big and working towards accomplishing a goal.*

Yet others who responded in this more abstract fashion chose to focus on the notion of equality.

- *I consider a democracy to be a society that is run by everybody. Every citizen should have the opportunity to have their voice heard, and considered while important decisions are being made. There should also be no one person that has control over everything.*
- *I define democracy as being a place/ setting where all parts that are included are equally involved and able to have their voice heard.*
- *Democracy is equality.*

Finally, it is worth noting that in regard to their role in a democracy, those respondents who did not focus on voting tended to either describe their role as somewhere on a continuum of awareness to action – echoing the themes from the citizenship responses. In other words, some participants simply felt it was their job to be aware of what is happening in their community, *“My role in a democracy is to stay educated about my nation’s leaders, problems and international affairs...”* Others spoke to the need to translate this awareness into some kind of action: *“To be aware of what is going on and be willing to stand up if need be.”* And still others spoke about their role in democracy as their responsibility to actively bring a level of awareness to others, *“To sway peoples minds to what is correct and let people have a better grasp of what I believe is right and wrong.”*

Service: A Cloudy Connection

The opening reflective exercise concluded with a question that asked participants to reflect on acts of service in which they have been engaged, and to state the ways in which these acts of service relate to their notions of citizenship and democracy. Of note, the majority of the respondents provided a list of service activities undertaken (despite not having been asked for this), and then offered very little in the way of describing their connection to citizenship or democracy. Many responses referenced the general notion of helping people in their community, but the complexities of power, role and responsibility (of the state and self), community, and identity were not raised by respondents.