

Service-Learning as the Violence of Mercy after the 2010 Haitian Earthquake

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Article abstract

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Service-Learning As The Violence of Mercy After The 2010 Haitian Earthquake

Megan Snider Bailey

ABSTRACT This article draws on Paul Farmer's ideas of accompaniment (2011) and "expert mercy" (2020, para. 2) and La Paperson's (2010) notion of the "violence of mercy" (p. 25) to demonstrate how the short-term, outsider service-learning response to the 2010 Haitian earthquake does not benefit community-identified needs. This is done by investigating the best practices of the Haiti Compact, a cohort of U.S. colleges and universities and an alternative break nonprofit operating short-term, outsider service-learning initiatives in post-earthquake Haiti in thoughtful ways intending to help with the recovery efforts while meaningfully contributing service via the routine presence of international volunteers. Despite good intentions, their material practices of service-learning risk harm for community partners and fail to meet established best practice goals. By examining the work of service-learning educators who commit to best practices, we can understand the limits of possibility for the pedagogy and point to alternatives that offer merciful responses to communities in crisis.

KEYWORDS Service-learning, alternative break, accompaniment, mercy, best practices, Haiti Compact

Short-term, outsider service in the wake of natural disasters often produces unintended consequences for communities affected, a phenomenon which Robert Merton (1936) refers to as "the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action" (p. 894). In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, the affected community often bands together out of collective duty and need. Once the immediate crisis passes, though, external forces spring to action, engaging in volunteerism as crisis response. Outside responders, be they military troops, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or service-learning classes, work to restore order by imposing external control over chaos.

Aaron Kuntz (2015) asks that we consider the effects of these outsiders' practices, which are intended to reestablish order in the wake of natural disasters. Attention to the efforts of short-term outsiders is necessary because their efforts carry heightened risk of "benevolent invasion" wherein attempts at assistance dictate how time and resources are invested and how a way forward from the crisis is defined and assessed (Illich, 1968, para. 8). In the wake of the 7.1 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, for example, Jonathan Katz (2013) notes that surplus international volunteer crews swarmed the ruins of the formerly

swanky Hotel Montana in Port-au-Prince, contributing to the successful rescue of twenty-one people and the recovery of deceased victims, most of whom were foreigners. While the value of the lives saved cannot be diminished, Katz (2013) notes that nearby communities, many of which faced more destruction and were nearer to the epicenter of the earthquake, received limited attention during the critical response phase. Because outsiders were unfamiliar with the local context and breadth and depth of community-identified needs, their efficacy was limited. While the effects of the unanticipated consequences of outside volunteers are often less momentous, the lack of context and clear understanding of community-identified needs risks a descent from natural disaster to man-made disaster. D.J. Van Hoving et al., (2010) provide a telling example in their account of post-earthquake medical service. They cared for victims in the days immediately following the earthquake only to later discover that other medical teams treated the same patients, leading to at least one known patient death from overtreatment. While an extreme example of the risk that short-term, outsider service can bring in the wake of natural disasters, it behooves volunteers and service-learning educators to consider the dangerous side effects of good intentions.

Short-term, outsider service-learning often amounts to what La Paperson (2010) calls a “violence of mercy” (p. 25) wherein unanticipated consequences to communities served outweigh the benefits of volunteers’ presence. While the scope and scale of service-learning initiatives vary, short-term, outsider service-learning experiences, sometimes referred to as alternative breaks, last one to three weeks during which small groups of students participate in compact volunteer experiences outside their own communities with the aim of “contribut[ing] volunteer hours to communities in need through an asset-based approach and to positively influenc[ing] the life” of student participants both during and after the experience (Piacitelli, et al., 2013, p. 89). Jill Piacitelli et al., (2013) note that these experiences employ best practices and align themselves with critical service-learning pedagogy and social justice (e.g., Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell, 2013) with the hope of creating active citizens.

This article investigates the work of the Haiti Compact: Higher Ed with Haiti, a conglomerate of U.S. public four-year research universities and private liberal arts colleges, including American University, College of William & Mary, Eastern Michigan University, Indiana University, Loyola Marymount University, Middlebury College, the University of Connecticut, and the University of Maryland- College Park, as well as Break Away, the U.S.-based nonprofit specializing in alternative breaks and collegiate service.¹ After witnessing and participating in short-term service-learning’s failures following Hurricane Katrina, a small group of U.S. service-learning educators partnered with Break Away to identify and develop best practices for post-natural disaster service-learning. Desiring to help in a way that did not perpetuate damage, Break Away and member institutions worked to envision post-disaster best practices for short-term, outsider service-learning. Those efforts were then acted upon in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

¹ Eastern Michigan University, Middlebury College, and the University of Connecticut joined the Haiti Compact after its founding, with the latter two ultimately withdrawing from the Compact. Indiana University initially participated in the Compact but withdrew before its four-year commitment expired (Brakeley et al., 2014).

The Haiti Compact pledges to be a source of job creation, capacity building, and economic growth for Haitians and a clearinghouse for best practices related to short-term, outsider service-learning trips for American college students serving in post-earthquake Haiti. In relying on best practices, the Haiti Compact believes that short-term, outsider service-learning might offer meaningful contributions to the recovery and rebuilding efforts while providing enriching learning experiences for collegians. In the four years following the earthquake and the creation of the Haiti Compact, 104 students participated in 16 service trips to Haiti, volunteering for a total of 1,380 hours and impacting 1,000 Haitian community members (Brakeley, et al., 2014). In 2014, the group committed to serving an additional four years in Haiti, but efforts fizzled out before 2018. Their commitment to best practices for short-term, outsider service-learning provides the ideal vehicle for a close reading of the possibility of service-learning in the wake of crises and the ways that best practices for short-term, outsider service-learning risk perpetuating violence cloaked as mercy.

Theoretical Framework

Martha Nussbaum (1993) notes that mercy extends beyond that which is expected; it is “gentleness going beyond due proportion” (p. 97). While mercy often concerns questions of punishment, we might think of mercy more broadly as an extension of relief. Mercy is a form a charity; it is an unanticipated dispensation of kindness rooted in a recognition of the self in the other. For the purposes of this article, mercy is an unanticipated social act that intervenes with the goal of improving material conditions for another person.

Paul Farmer, a physician and author known for his work with Partners in Health in Haiti, calls for “expert mercy” in responding to individuals affected by entrenched structural problems (para. 2). In the medical field, expert mercy represents wraparound, holistic care of patients. It requires the physician to go beyond pathology and treatment to understand the experience of and respond to the whole person. Key to this definition, though, is competency. Writing about the necessity of expert mercy at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Farmer argues, “when you’re critically ill, expert mercy looks like expert nursing care. When you’re coughing and short of breath, expert mercy is an oxygen mask or a mechanical ventilator” (Farmer, 2020, para. 10). Mercy requires more than a compassionate stance; an ability to couple compassion with effectiveness is needed.

Mercy distinguishes itself from other forms of charity in that it is meant to be a longitudinal commitment or means of approaching others. Nussbaum (1993) notes, “The merciful tradition stresses that merciful judgement can be given only when there is time to learn the whole complex history of the life in question and also inclination to do so in a sympathetic manner, without biases of class or race” (p. 117). Continuing to think with Farmer about the longitudinal requirement of mercy, we might understand this work as accompaniment. Farmer (2011) writes:

To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end.... We’re not

sure exactly where the beginning might be, and we're almost never sure about the end. There's an element of mystery, of openness, in accompaniment: I'll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate for a while. And by 'a while,' I don't mean a little while. Accompaniment is much more often about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed by the person or people being accompanied, rather than the *accompagneur*. (para. 2, italics in original)

Accompaniment demands authentic relationship; it is a process of living and being together, of keeping company for the long haul. As an example of the depth of relationship that accompaniment demands, Farmer (2011) tells the story of a child cancer patient and her mother that moved into his faculty apartment for over a year while she underwent chemotherapy. They became a family as they lived life together, eating, joking, playing, and dealing with the strains of illness together. Thus accompaniment is friendship or partnership wherein roles or expectations are not clear; mercy abounds in this connection.

In contrast to Nussbaum's (1993) and Farmer's (2011) valuing of mercy, La Paperson (2010) asks us to reconsider mercy through a critical lens. Mercy attempts to respond to need; intervening in the chaos of plunder to alleviate with order. Despite its façade of helping grace, Paperson (2010) argues mercy is merely a shift in the logic and strategy of plunder. A merciful response to disorder sets conditions and frames possibilities. Writing about the state takeover of schools deemed failing in Oakland, California, Paperson (2010) suggests that outsider intervention into local communities is offered up as a saving grace (a lottery system to remove children from failing schools) but does not respond to local community needs or desires ("an offer met with laughter from parents. They perceived it as either a barefaced lie or a barefaced belief that colonial schooling was what befitted their children") (p. 25). Mercy offers a cover for plunder:

"Now sufficiently abject, school communities like ours in Oakland are supposed to be grateful for any new regimen of test prep, the outsourcing of afterschool programs to private tutoring corporations, the placement of liberal and underprepared teachers in the 'hood, and so on" (Paperson, 2010, p. 26).

To Paperson and the students, teachers, parents, and community members he interviews, the breaking apart of a community school deemed failing does not meet a community-identified need or offer new possibilities of hope to the students affected. The closure of the school and random assignment of students to new schools appears to respond to needs but closes off possibilities for the community. The community no longer possesses a neighborhood school that they can invigorate, a cornerstone of their community ethos, or a space to cultivate their children. The closure of the school on the part of outsiders is meant as charity, drawing on best practices established by federal policy. The veneer of charity and respite on the part of outsiders amounts to a "false invitation to join the domain of justice" that ought be "recognize[d] as

violence” (Paperson, 2010, p. 26). Charity distributed out of mercy does not meet community-identified needs nor offer wanted change to structures.

Thinking with Paperson (2010), Tasha Parrish (2013) argues, “mercy is administered within the narrative and interpretation of the dominant group, and actually functions to fuel patronizing beliefs” (p. 18). Because of the damage that outsider control in the form of mercy allows, Paperson (2010) suggests we might think of it as Freirean (1968/1970) “false generosity” (p. 44). Freire argues that false generosity is charity offered on the part of the oppressors which does not address causes or structures of oppression. Because conditions remain unaffected:

False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the ‘rejects of life,’ to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands — whether of individuals or entire peoples — need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world (Freire, 1968/1970, p. 45).

Short-term, outsider service-learning in the wake of the Haiti earthquake needs to be read through this critical lens because best practices and actions are determined not by the community but by outsiders. Efforts to respond to the crisis are generous, but the effects amount to violence.

Short term, outsider service-learning relies on best practices as a guide given that true understanding of the community and its needs are distorted by temporal and geographical distance. While outsiders can do good, as Farmer’s (2011) practices of expert mercy and accompaniment demonstrate, outsider presence in volunteer efforts, particularly in the wake of a crisis like the Haiti earthquake, risk a loss of community control and reliance on false generosity wherein volunteers offer a superficial or damaging response. This article will demonstrate the way that best practices for short-term, outsider service-learning manifest as the violence of mercy and seek to point to ways in which educators might practice a pedagogy of expert mercy and accompaniment instead.

Literature Review

Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher (1996) define service-learning as an educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 222). The pedagogy is practiced in both curricular and co-curricular contexts; the duration of service and types of assignments vary—from one-day volunteer projects as part of an introductory course to capstone projects solving a disciplinary problem (Jacoby, 2015). Responding to critiques of the pedagogy as one that reifies whiteness and inculcates a savior complex in students, some educators practice “critical service-learning,” which prioritizes “social change,” “redistribut[ion of] power,” and “development of authentic relationships” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 263; see also, Sheffield, 2015). Mitchell (2007) argues that employing a critical lens

“generates responsible community participants working for a more just and equitable society” (p. 110). Mitchell (2007) recommends a longitudinal commitment that begins with students volunteering and thinking about their service experience and develops over the course of years into an engaged social action effort.

In the context of a crisis such as the Haiti earthquake, practicing service-learning takes on an added layer of complexity. Vernor Munoz (2010) argues that any attempt at aid in the wake of a crisis “should act with the affected rather than for them” (p. 13). This means that service-learning educators have the burden of understanding and responding to community-identified needs alongside community members who may have multiple, competing priorities and obligations in the wake of the crisis. One way service-learning has been utilized successfully is by students responding to disasters in their own educational communities. Stephen Yoder (2013), for example, implemented service-learning after a series of tornados ravaged much of Alabama, including neighborhoods in the vicinity of the university where he teaches. Yoder finds that even a “somewhat impromptu response to a disaster can be an effective service-learning experience” (p. 113) though he admits “inherent inefficiencies” in the response (p. 126). Importantly, though, these inefficiencies are mitigated by rootedness in the community served, given that both the instructor and the students participating in the service-learning experience were ingrained in the community context before the crisis.

Despite the layered difficulties of responses to crises, Yarimar Bonilla (2020) notes that outsider intervention can also be valuable. She describes the absence of outsider intervention after Hurricane Maria destroyed much of Puerto Rico in 2017. She notes that while Puerto Ricans experiencing the immediate aftermath of the hurricane anticipated a rapid response from the United States federal government and the aid industrial complex, this cavalry never appeared, leaving locals to stew in the crisis. Bonilla (2020) quotes a local schoolteacher who mused, “We are the protagonists of our recovery” (p. 8). The haunting absence of outsider response made possible “autogestion,” or the self-determination of locals who responded to the crisis themselves, initiating a process of response and slowly moving into recovery in fits and spurts (p. 9). While empowering, Bonilla (2020) does not argue that autogestion ought to be the go-to response for communities experiencing disaster; she is critical of the absence of outsider intervention and notes that outsiders have an important role to play in response and recovery after crises. While Bonilla does not focus explicitly on service-learning, we might think with her in considering the role that student volunteers can play in assisting in effective, community-driven responses to crises and the practices that help build successful partnerships.

To ensure that service-learning efforts meet both community needs and student learning outcomes, many educators identify practices or standards that service-learning curricula ought to follow. These best practices vary but tend to include recommendations to prepare students for success, highlight and respond to community-identified needs, promote students and community members as sources of knowledge and expertise, make longitudinal commitments to partnerships, include reflection to make meaning of the service experience, strive for mutual reciprocity, and assess (e.g., Break Away, 2017; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Jacoby, 2015; Jenkins & Sheehy, 2012; Mitchell, 2007). Yet Dan Butin (2013) argues that research on

the effectiveness of these practices and others is largely absent. He argues that homing in on best practices constrains service-learning education by “privileg[ing] quantification and thus normalization” (p. 1687). Butin suggests that the push toward concretizing best practices for service-learning risks devaluing service-learning pedagogy as an alternative to the banking model of education. If educators prioritize meeting set standards, the focus cannot be on a liberatory, just education that humanizes community members and students alike.

Methodology & Methods

To investigate best practices for short-term, outsider service-learning, this article employs a documentary review of the Haiti Compact’s materials. The Haiti Compact was chosen as the case because of its explicit, longitudinal commitment to alternative breaks and service-learning in post-earthquake Haiti. Member institutions, students, and their nonprofit partner, Break Away, produced a wealth of documents, including best practice guidelines, annual reports, community partner interviews, academic publications, student reflections, and YouTube videos, all of which offer insight into the ways that best practices actualize in the context of short-term, outsider service-learning. Because this research involved documentary analysis rather than direct work with human subjects, Institutional Review Board approval was unnecessary. Studying the Haiti Compact was appealing because its work is well-regarded in the field (e.g., Jacoby, 2015) and their use of best practices is based on a commitment to excellence in critical service-learning. Understanding whether best practices can work in such a difficult context and what the limitations of service-learning might be drew me to this case.

While I am not part of the Haiti Compact, I use community-based pedagogies in my classes and teach students to think about the limitations of service and aid by drawing on the example of the international response to Haiti in the wake of the earthquake. I am interested in this case because I participated in a short-term, outsider service-learning trip to Carrefour, Haiti, in August 2010. I spent the months leading up to service in Haiti studying volunteerism and social action and participating in advocacy efforts before travelling to Haiti to help remove rubble from a partially collapsed parsonage and paint a new dormitory to house future aid workers. Our co-curricular service-learning group partnered with United Methodist Volunteers in Mission in Port-au-Prince in this work and spent evenings reflecting on our service and usefulness in the relief effort. We had thoughtful teachers and learned from our community partners. The experience led me to higher education and community-engaged learning as a profession. That said, I left Haiti with a sense that the service I provided did not justify my presence, that my mercy and hopefulness in volunteering did not affect structures or benefit the community. While studying curriculum theory in graduate school, I began to develop the language to explore and interrogate that sense of discomfort. By then a service-learning educator myself, I began to wonder if a curriculum for this type of service-learning experience could be developed in ways that would benefit both students and communities. This inquiry led me to the Haiti Compact, an exemplar in the field for its intentionality in applying best practices to the complicated task of short-term, outsider service-learning in the wake of a crisis.

Because the Haiti Compact had largely completed its work but left a substantial documentary trail by the time I began my research, I decided to employ an hermeneutical analysis.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977) defines hermeneutics as “the art of clarifying and mediating by our own effort of interpretation what is said by persons we encounter in the tradition. Hermeneutics operates whenever what is said is not immediately intelligible” (p. 98). As a service-learning educator myself, I have spent years practicing and studying service-learning as pedagogy. Given that the Haiti Compact documents are written for service-learning educators, it would be reasonable to assume that the intentions and effects of the Haiti Compact’s efforts might meet Gadamer’s clarity standard. Yet I must also think with Melissa Freeman (2014) who reminds us that hermeneutics can aid scholars in recognizing “the hold tradition has on us” (p. 828). I am inclined to see the value in the Haiti Compact’s efforts because I engage in similar practices in my own teaching.

Here, then, I think with Jeannie Kerr (2020) who reminds me of my positionality as a settler colonist benefitting from neocolonial structures. I include myself when I admit that service-learning educators can be enmeshed in deficit logics and the structures of neocolonialism that frame and inform our practices. Thus, I make an ethical commitment to honestly interrogate the work of the Haiti Compact—fellow educators in this messy labour of learning in community. We—the Haiti Compact and myself—are tangled in the contradictions of doing this work. Thus, I must look beyond the first narrative apparent in the texts to engage in a critical dialogue with the Haiti Compact given the “[neo]colonial context in which my inquiry is immersed” (Kerr, 2020, p. 545). Only in a close exploration of those contradictions can I demonstrate how powerful and encompassing the structures of neocolonialism guiding service-learning remain.

This hermeneutical analysis of the Haiti Compact, then, seeks to be a process of reading and reflecting with the Haiti Compact rather than a disembodied critique. In doing so, I work to resist the tendencies of researchers (and service-learners) to swoop in and comment without consideration of how research affects communities; instead, an ethical commitment to sitting with, thinking with, and improving with guides my efforts. This is important to me methodologically because the people of the Haiti Compact are my peers. They are fellow service-learning educators who share in a dream of affective service that engages learning in community.

Hermeneutics requires reading and re-reading the texts of the Haiti Compact to understand what and who are centered in their efforts and the ways that such decisions might affect practices. The strength of hermeneutical analysis is that it allows for a reading and thinking with varied source material to grapple with intentions and their effects (Freeman, 2011). One way that I try to think with the Haiti Compact is by reading the works that influence their efforts, including Katz (2013) and Farmer (2011). One theme that emerges from both texts is mercy, which became a code as I explored the Haiti Compact data. While the Haiti Compact does not use the phrase ‘mercy’ in their official materials, I was struck by the various ways that intent to help and relieve suffering are framed and began thinking of this framing in comparison to the ways that help manifests in Katz (2013) and Farmer (2011). I started

reading and thinking about the Haiti Compact through Paperson's (2010) violence of mercy. This phrase offers a powerful way to explore the phenomenon of assistance and service that produces unintended harm, and ultimately became the lens through which I read short-term, outsider service-learning.

Because I began researching the Haiti Compact after their work concluded, triangulation based on ethnographic fieldwork or longitudinal studies of participants' development and community partner attitudes was not possible. This research also depends on the work of Haiti Compact participants, including reports meant for external audiences. Some internal documents pertaining to their efforts were not available to me as an outsider researching their work after its completion. These are significant limitations of this study which would benefit from further inquiry.

Findings

The Haiti Compact (2011) notes that its purpose is "to collect, research, and recommend methods for colleges and universities to most effectively respond to the rebuilding process in post-earthquake Haiti" (p. 11) as part of a "process of creating new models and paradigms about service" (p. 41). From its initial trip to Haiti in June 2010, the Haiti Compact (2011) developed Principles and Practices for Alternative Breaks (pp. 12-16). Founded upon Break Away's (2017) "Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break," the Haiti Compact tailors these best practices to post-disaster relief via short-term, outsider service-learning efforts in Haiti. The best practice guidelines comprise an effort to evaluate those issues and organizations "that are really making [service-learning educators] furrow our brows;" the intended outcome is "a tool to actually help us to be held back and a little more objective" (Piacitelli, as cited in Murphy, 2015, p. 133).

The Haiti Compact splits its eight best practices into three overarching categories, which might be referred to as commitments (strong direct service, full engagement, and diversity and social justice), practices (orientation, education, and training), and follow through (reflection and reorientation). These best practices were selected in response to problems with previous short-term, outsider service-learning projects in crises, but the Haiti Compact (2011) recognizes that many valuable actions on the part of service-learning educators, including horizontal decision-making and mutual reciprocity, do not make the list. Instead, they suggest that service-learning educators and programs tailor best practices to their students and partnerships. Ultimately, its goal is that use of these best practices during short-term, outsider service-learning projects will develop students as active citizens and allow for meaningful partnerships with Haitian organizations.

The Haiti Compact operationalizes these best practices by requiring students participate in service in Haiti as part of the recovery effort. This is critical to the success of their model wherein individual students participate in a service-learning project for one to two weeks because immersive service-learning is thought to mimic the learning outcomes in two to seven days that a semester-based service-learning course achieves over the course of eight to ten weeks (Bowman, Brandenberger, Mick, & Toms Smelley, 2010). Yet the Haiti Compact's model of routine service trips by new student groups demands that the Haitian communities perform the role of teacher

and cultural competency guide for each team of students desiring the experience of providing strong, direct service, leading to inefficiencies and risks. One volunteer coordinator expressed frustration that college student volunteers regularly ignore his efforts at risk management while another community partner noted that volunteer safety comprises the bulk of her duties whenever a Haiti Compact team is serving (Murphy, 2015). Another way in which the commitment to direct service might be a detriment to Haitians served is that the ongoing presence of short-term outsiders represents a constant reminder of the trauma of the earthquake and the loss of friends and family members (The Haiti Compact, 2011). For these reasons, the United States (United States) State Department warns outsiders against participating in direct service in Haiti and instead recommends “cash donations” as the most “culturally and environmentally appropriate response to the crisis” (U.S. State Department, 2011, as cited in Piacitelli et al., 2013, pp. 93-94), guidance that the Haiti Compact noted but did not heed.

The Haiti Compact also recommends the practice of full engagement as a guide for how students operate while volunteering. Full engagement indicates that the students adopt the norms and values of their host community. Break Away (2017) stipulates that on a practical level, a stance of full engagement in community means that students commit to institution-mandated safety standards while still getting a sense of Haitian culture. In practicing full engagement, Haiti Compact (2011) leaders emphasize that their students serve alongside Haitians:

We strongly recommend that alternative breakers support local labor while in country, through program fees that pay salaries for cooks, drivers, guides, and translators. We also recommend partnering with organizations that help students develop relationships with Haitian mentors by paying a salary to a local worker who can help students learn how to complete their projects (p. 12).

By compensating supplemental staff and team leaders, the Haiti Compact hopes its efforts will not cause Haitians to lose jobs. The Haiti Compact also pledges that each volunteer will pay for a local labourer to work with them (Murphy, 2015). The intention is that short-term, outsider service-learning augments income in the community served. However, their projects often do not require expertise. One Haiti Compact service-learning project, for example, engaged students in packing bags of compost, meant to reforest Haiti, with the goal of stabilizing future flooding and erosion. In a single day, the students packaged 2,091 bags of compost, learning about deforestation and environmentalism in the process (William & Mary Haiti Compact, 2013). However, Porter (2013) reports that the Haiti Compact’s community partner, Sonje Ayiti, received a grant from Haiti’s Ministry of the Environment allowing the organization to pay Haitians to pack the compost bags in hope that the compost would nourish 200,000 new trees. This means that the 2,091 bags of compost packed by Haiti Compact represent 2,091 opportunities where a volunteer paid to serve, taking away opportunity for Haitians to earn payment for the same labour.

The third best practice that the Haiti Compact adopts to ground its efforts is a commitment to social justice education. They ask campuses to recruit and send “participants representing the

range of students present in the campus community” (Break Away, 2017, para. 3). They also stipulate that short-term, international service-learning trips should “engage participants in dialogue that furthers understanding of how systems of power, privilege, and oppression relate to social issues and service work in communities” (Break Away, 2017, para. 3). It is unclear based on documents available whether and how this commitment was actualized or assessed.

Next, the Haiti Compact (2011) recommends that participating students take part in a six-to-eight-week pre-trip experience wherein they learn the skills, competencies, and attitudes necessary for service in Haiti. The Haiti Compact (2011) believes students should learn about Haiti’s social and cultural context and relationship with the U.S. and survey the issue they will address. One service-learning educator partnering with the Haiti Compact suggests that the efforts result in success:

By the time we get to Haiti, [the students] are curious; [that] is a very good way to describe it.... In pre-trip meetings and education we try to expose them to as much as possible... to get that curiosity to come out.... We talk about myths, stigmas, stereotypes, you know, initial...surface level judgments or perceptions that people in our society or other societies may have of Haiti...and then talk about where...we think [they] come from. What do we think may not be true about those assumptions?... How can we... help to not perpetuate those assumptions during our trip?... I would say they are definitely very curious and ask just incredible questions. I think... that helps them engage in a [deeper] level of conversation and dialogue whereas if they were... just arriving... [and] just... hearing about some of these things, they may not... be open to (as cited in Murphy, 2015, p. 140).

In focusing on pre-trip teaching, the Haiti Compact hopes that students will be able to build capacity while in Haiti.

Continuous learning while in Haiti is encouraged as another best practice. Break Away (2017) argues, “powerful education should... include information to connect participants’ personal life choices and experiences” (para. 5). A Haiti Compact student’s reflection confirms this goal. The student wrote, “The time we spent in Haiti was thought-provoking, enlightening, rejuvenating, and I know it forever changed the way I think about international aid and development” (as cited in The Haiti Compact, 2012, para. 31). The focus here is on making the experience of service meaningful to students so they might become active citizens.

To prepare students for effective service despite differences in experience, the Haiti Compact (2011) insists that students should be equipped with knowledge of “survival Haitian Creole,” “disaster relief and preparedness,” and “culture shock and cross-cultural communication skills” (p. 26), as well as the service tasks the communities require. Unfortunately, a focus on training does not mean that students arrive equipped to employ their expertise successfully. Even when students possess unique skills related to their subject matter, these skills might not translate with an external audience. For example, one Haiti Compact team focused on maternal health

and nutrition. In advance of their time in Haiti, the students researched and prepared curricula concerning maternal health for rural Haitian women, including “nutrition during pregnancy, birth, birthing pains, [and] the moringa tree” (Johnson, 2014, para. 4). Moringa trees provide critical nutrients to pregnant and nursing mothers and have been called “the mother’s best friend” (Chukwuebuka, 2015, p. 624). The students’ task was to move to different Haitian communities to teach pregnant and nursing mothers how to best care for their health and the health of their babies while making use of newly planted moringa trees. However, the students soon learned that their research had been for naught. One student participant reflects:

Gabie [the community partner] explained that the mothers hadn’t taken good enough care to protect the moringa trees given to them, which was why goats could easily destroy them. We realized we should’ve reiterated that information even more so that they could be convinced to take better care of the trees. Gabie went on to explain that a lot of the information we had prepared was already well known and had been conveyed to locals by Haitian health workers (Johnson, 2014, para. 6).

The service-learning team concluded, “We could help by reiterating that information in order to build up the locals’ confidence in their health workers’ knowledge, thus building a better relationship of trust” (Johnson, 2014, para. 6). However, this experience undermines the argument that students can be trained in skills and knowledge that translate across contexts and community partnerships. While the students likely learned from the experience of realizing that the community held more knowledge via lived experience about a matter they had trained for, the same service provided by a local community partner rather than a group of short-term, outsider service-learning students would have a stronger impact on the community served.

Another best practice that the Haiti Compact endorses is reflection. The Haiti Compact (2011) recommends covering topics including, “root causes of poverty, power and privilege, activism and advocacy, U.S. involvement in Haiti” and “post-service activism” (p. 26). The Haiti Compact encourages the use of “What? So what? Now what?” reflection questions. However, prompts and rubrics for students to engage in reflection are not standardized beyond suggested topics, leaving faculty to develop individualized assessments. The danger of this is that students’ interpretations and assumptions may not be critically engaged. Take for example, the reflection penned by one Haiti Compact short-term, international service-learning student about his travels:

There I was, traveling through the busy marketplace in the passenger seat of a bleach white, fully packed, Adventure SUV. You know, the kind you’d imagine safariing [*sic*] through the Serengeti. My eyes glued to the window like a dog on its first car ride, the streets tossed us around from end to end while our diesel monster roared on, but nothing could have taken my eyes off of what lye [*sic*] outside. The country is hot and dilapidated, but that only serves to

feed its people's charismatic rhythm. Street vendors, selling everything from fresh fruit to that missing lugnut [*sic*] on your motorbike waved on and yelled, while swarms of laughing children run along side [*sic*] the cars. While I looked on in awe, they too saw something inside of our jam-packed [*sic*] tincan [*sic*], something their warm smiles seemed to enjoy. An alien in a foreign land, I was welcomed, unconditionally and with open arms. These are a happy people, and contrary to our horror novels, this land is rich in culture and in spirit. The circus rolled on, tossing smiles back and forth until we disembarked here, a pleasant home in the heart of Haiti's nutrient countryside. Currently, sitting, the sun well past his shift, with howling hounds and insomniac roosters crying into the night. I am humbled (Mondesir, 2015, para. 2).

This student reflection offers a descriptive account of the day without connecting experience to theory, course readings, or discussions. The student uses language that evokes the exotic and an Othering gaze without critically questioning his role or perception. This is a superficial reflection that does not meet Mitchell's (2007) standard of critical reflection that "encourages students to examine their own identities in relation to the larger social context of their service and the issues uncovered through the readings" (p. 109). While this is one example, it is typical of other student reflections in the document review, which tend to be student observations without a back-and-forth theoretical dialogue about the experience.

As the final best practice recommendation of the Haiti Compact, reorientation recognizes the critical learning that takes place when students return from short-term, international service-learning trips. The Haiti Compact (2011) prioritizes a stance of "advocacy and action as students return to their home communities" (p. 12). While short-term, outsider service-learning may serve as a "catalyst," the Haiti Compact (2011) argues that it cannot be the sole element of active citizenship (p. 12). Instead they argue that a best practice element of the Haiti Compact must be the translation of social concern to home communities and local issues students observe after the service-learning experience concludes. The Haiti Compact (2011) intends reorientation as a process of post-trip advocacy "engaging the campus community in education about Haiti" via the "production of educational and awareness materials and sessions" (p. 26). This might involve a "teach-in" or collaborative work done in conjunction with Haitian students (The Haiti Compact, 2011, p. 38). All these continued advocacy efforts post-service-learning are meant to be student-driven based on their impressions of Haitian needs during their time in country.

These best practices are meant to "provid[e] a practical way to subvert those one-sided practices and work toward truly reciprocal relationships where the community's voice is not only listened to, but it is the dominant voice in the discussion of how change can happen" (The Haiti Compact, 2011, p. 41). The communities served by Haiti Compact's short-term, international service-learning classes report mixed results despite the merciful intentions established in the Haiti Compact's best practice guidelines.

For some Haiti Compact community partners, the presence of short-term, international service-learning teams offers value. For instance, Gabriel Vincent, who represents Haiti Compact community partner Sonje Ayiti, said of the American students travelling to serve in Haiti:

We want them. I mean, it's like a win-win situation. I'm learning from you. You're learning from them, and also give them the chance to appreciate who they are as human[s. And to learn that] life is not what they see right here in the US. As you see here, the world is more global than the local community. And also, what they take, what they learn from us in Haiti, they can take back with them in the U.S. and continue that fight in their backyard because they have also people struggling in the U.S. (Murphy, 2015, p. 137).

At other times, community partners communicate a dissatisfaction with the usefulness of short-term, outsider service-learning. A representative of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Haiti questions the work of short-term, international service-learning teams participating in Haiti Compact efforts: "Who is it for? I think a lot of Haitians would say, maybe there are some benefits but it feels like we are giving and providing and helping these people expand their universes, and expand their minds, and have these global experiences and we are left here...and we have to carry on" (Murphy, 2015, p. 128) . Another Haiti Compact community partner, Father Joseph Philippe of the Asosyasyon Peyizan Fondwa argues:

We help American University to fulfill its objectives but not to fulfill our own objectives. Because, you know, for us, we want to enter into a partnership. It's a give and take. Now we are just a channel to help them fulfill their spring break program. That's the main thing, you know, to help them facilitate their spring break program. You know? But at the other hand, it is helpful in a certain sense because they pay for their fees and also they can take a small project, you know, like planting trees...but that's all. That's all. But we really want to enter into a real partnership, you know, where actually, you know, we need curriculum development...we need human capacity and we know that there are groups, even USAID in the U.S. where they can fund, finance...the collaboration between a U.S. university and a local university... I have talked to Shoshanna [Sumka] a few times about that. I think that she is aware of that for two years. I want to do that but for two years nothing concrete has happened in terms of developing a real strong relationship (Murphy, 2015, pp. 171-172).

Despite a commitment to best practices meant to promote active citizenship via routinized short-term, outsider service-learning, two years into the partnership, a Haiti Compact community partner complained that the partnership remained superficial even as Haiti Compact administrators prided themselves on developing an equitable and long-lasting partnership rooted in best practices.

Discussion

The Haiti Compact's emphasis on best practice guidelines required of all participating schools and service-learning courses is in keeping with the assumption that service-learning needs scientific rigor to thrive in the academy (e.g., Steinke & Fitch, 2007). The goal of best practices in service-learning is standardization and replication, so that community partners and students can be assured of set and tested benefits associated with service-learning (e.g., Miller, et al., 2012). While the desire to ascertain reciprocity is notable, there is little that is predictable about learning in community — particularly when students are outsiders in a community responding to disaster. Yet in identifying certain practices as valuable, the Haiti Compact falls into a hierarchical trap of setting certain practices as gold standards, which belong in every service-learning practice, while allowing others — like mutuality of learning, “felt problems” (Sheffield, 2015, p. 113), asset-based community development, and placed learning — to fall by the wayside. In packaging best practices for the complicated work of learning in community, the Haiti Compact abandons the full potential of service-learning to that which can be standardized.

Furthermore the gap between stated best practice and its application in the field is vast, particularly in a community context as sensitive and dynamic as post-earthquake Haiti. Sara Grusky (2000) observes that short-term, outsider service-learning “can easily become small theaters that recreate historical cultural misunderstandings and simplistic stereotypes and replay, on a more intimate scale, the huge disparities in income and opportunity that characterize North-South relations today” (p. 858). Service-learning that is both short-term and done outside a community that students and educators are familiar with must rely too heavily on best practices because the context and relationships are not nested.

The problem with reliance on best practices to justify short-term, outsider service-learning in the wake of a crisis is two-fold. First, the students serving perpetuate the violence of mercy because their engagement is not accompaniment. The goal of short-term service-learning is for students' service to be a catalyst for them as individuals. The best practices are meant to shape individuals as active citizens in their own communities; Haiti and the post-disaster recovery and relief context are merely the setting for this individual change to take place. While the Haiti Compact's longitudinal commitment to Haiti attempts to mitigate the harm of short-term volunteerism, the students participating in the program rotate with each trip. Functionally this means that relationships must continuously be negotiated and restarted. We see this in the way that best practices of full engagement, diversity and social justice, training, and reflection manifest in less than idealized ways when implemented. The Haiti Compact utilizes the model of relationship between institutions, but institutions are not people and the true, authentic relationships of accompaniment cannot happen at an organizational level.

The second way that the Haiti Compact's efforts amount to the violence of mercy lies in the absent promise of expert mercy. Despite best practice guidelines that ensure student training in faculties needed for recovery and rebuilding, Haiti Compact students do not necessarily bring with them a unique skillset, nor does their service-learning routinely engage skills that are explicitly connected to student learning goals. As the output of the Haiti Compact shows,

short-term, outsider service-learning teams offer superficial responses to the crisis. These perfunctory services are often masked as meaningful efforts to engage, yet they perpetuate merciful violence because no meaningful change occurs and community-identified needs are not met in the best possible way.

Conclusion

Despite a thoughtful commitment to best practices meant to circumvent pitfalls in short-term, outsider service-learning, the Haiti Compact's efforts are not able to connect stated best practices with results. If a program as successful and well regarded as the Haiti Compact struggles with this work, is it possible to develop short-term, outsider service-learning programs that meet the standards of expert mercy and accompaniment? Can outsiders engaging in service-learning in the wake of a crisis avoid perpetuating the violence of mercy?

While Bonilla (2020) and Yoder (2013) remind us that there is a space for volunteers in the wake of a crisis, extensive preparation and education are necessary to ensure that students are effective and merciful volunteers. One way that this might be done is by utilizing a pre-service education model wherein students read and learn about citizenship, cosmopolitanism, obligation, and aid while practicing service in their local community. Helping students think through structures and ideologies which affect and exacerbate crises like the Haiti earthquake while also asking them to practice citizenship in their communities would prime students to critically question and reflect upon their role as outsiders in future service-learning experiences.

Yoder's (2013) model of engaging local students in crisis response might also be a merciful approach. Local students have a vested interest in their community, understand community-identified needs better than outsiders, and are able to practice accompaniment more so than external volunteers. Schools, colleges, and universities in local communities should lead service-learning efforts responding to needs in their communities, rather than external groups. Students interested in investing in problems and community needs external to their local community might consider semester or yearlong study abroad or exchange programs with service and community-engaged components as a means of accompaniment in community.

Finally, service-learning educators ought to pay careful attention to the 'expert' requirement of expert mercy. Service-learning should be assigned whenever it is the best way of both meeting community-identified needs and student learning outcomes. In a context as volatile as a post-disaster situation, students should have robust knowledge that directly benefits a community-identified need and critical awareness of how to best utilize that knowledge. This might involve foreign language students translating materials for other first responders, engineering students helping develop building plans which are disaster resistant, or biology students testing water samples for quality assurance. Students apply their disciplinary and subject matter knowledge in a way that benefits the community served while making meaning of skills and theories learned in the classroom. In this way, students contribute their unique, burgeoning expertise and engage mercifully in community.

While the Haiti Compact names best practices meant to ensure the success of short-term, outsider service-learning in a post-disaster context, their efforts do not translate into consistently

valuable practices. The result is too often a violence of mercy wherein good intentions negatively affect or do not benefit community-identified needs. Aligning practices with the intent of critical service-learning means that students practice accompaniment and engage in expert mercy. Thus, service-learning educators ought to rethink plans for short-term, outsider service-learning trips, particularly those responding to crisis situations like the Haiti earthquake.

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