

Reading Reflection #6  
**To Hell with Good Intentions  
Helping, Fixing, or Serving?  
Sit Down. Be Quiet. Pay Attention.**

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To begin with Remen's article, I really enjoyed the first paragraph; I feel it really defines the stark differences between helping, fixing, and serving (1999). I had never consciously thought of the differences before, even though I have done community service since I was a kid in Girl Scouts. However, the only one I've ever thought of in a somewhat negative light is "fixing" because the word itself implies that there is something broken or damaged in need of repair. I've never used that same logic with the word "helping" before because I've always thought of help as a purely positive action, such as helping with putting away the groceries. But if "help" means seeing the person you're helping as weak or unable to help themselves, then it has a more negative meaning. However, even if these words have a negative connotation, I don't think that necessarily detracts from their meaning; "fix" and "help" still mean that there is a potential to get better and contributing to that transformation is definitely positive. I also think that helping and serving work two ways; when you're assisting someone else, whether they're consciously trying to assist you back, you're still benefitting from the exchange as well. For example, we are providing a service at CPY, but we are also benefitting from the experience as well.

This heavily relates to Sigmon's article as well; you really need to be aware of your motivations as well as the community you're entering when participating in service in order to make sure you're not just "using" the experience for your benefit (1995). This requires a clear understanding of your own assumptions and biases. In our service learning, I think this relates to the Community Scan we conducted at the beginning of the semester, which also connects to the Service Learning Outcome "Service and Social Awareness." Through the community scan we gathered data from the area which later contributed to our understanding of any previous assumptions we had about the area. I think this introspection is especially important because it's so easy to continue on without examining your own motivations and

expectations. Once you're aware—once you've sat down, been quiet, and paid attention—it's easier to alter your technique to make sure you're not “using” the community.

This ties in with Illich's address as well. Illich mentions how American's spend time in Latin America to “help” with the poverty situation without acknowledging the poverty in America itself (1968). The key message I drew from his statement was that leaving your problems at home is equivalent to ignorance in both the definition of “serving” and to one's own motivations. If you were truly “serving” then location wouldn't make a difference, so it becomes a matter of motivation. I don't think it's necessarily good or bad if your motivations completely selfless; the important bit is to be honest. If you're honest and they reject an offer of service, then it's up to you to show the same courtesy they gave by being respectful of your honesty. In other words, one must be aware of their assumptions and biases (like Sigmon suggests) as well as the nature of the assistance they're providing (whether it's “helping,” “fixing,” or “serving” like Remen's article describes).

Illich, I. (1968, Apr 20). *To hell with good intentions*. Retrieved from [http://www.swaraj.org/illich\\_hell.htm](http://www.swaraj.org/illich_hell.htm)

Remen, R.N. (1999, Sep). *Helping, fixing, or serving?* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.uc.edu/content/dam/uc/honors/docs/communityengagement/HelpingFixingServing.pdf>

Sigmon, R.L. (1995). *Sit down. Be quiet. Pay attention*. [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://googlegroups.com/a/nylc.org/group/he-sl-listserv/attach/2f1765c7b6449/Sigmon.pdf>

Notes:

I really liked the opening paragraph of Remen's article;

Never thought of helping in a negative light before

Sometimes helping is 2way

Real experiences stick better, gain real first hand understanding

Reflecting is important

Not just "using" the community

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Connection to "Self & Social Awareness" and "Service & Social Responsibility"

SSA analysis of assumptions, stereotypes, values

SSR critical understanding of ethical behavior

By leaving problems at home you're being ignorant