“I DO MORE SERVICE IN THIS CLASS THAN I EVER DO AT MY SITE”

Paying Attention to the Reflections of Students of Color in Service-Learning

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“I do more service in this class than I ever do at my site.”

This reflection, shared by a student in a short paper, was an unexpected outburst prompted by several weeks of frustration in his service-learning class. This young Latino from the local community was struggling with a community experience that he found incredibly rewarding while partnered with a classroom experience that depressed and frequently angered him.

This response is not one usually reported in the service-learning literature. Much of the literature touts the transformational nature of the pedagogy, stressing the benefits students gain: improved grades, strengthened communication, leadership skills, and appreciation for diversity, among many others (Astin & Sax, 1998; Densmore, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). On occasion the literature warns against the possibilities of service-learning reinforcing deficit notions and prejudicial attitudes (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Butin, 2005; Chesler & Vasques Scalera, 2000; Green, 2001). The deficits that service-learning reinforces are frequently race-based and place blame on the identity of the people or communities where students serve. And those who walk away from service-learning experiences harboring deficit attitudes are either named or assumed to be White.

This student’s reaction to the experiences of the classroom—to questions, to arguments, to unsolicited disparaging comments about his community—led to a host of questions about how service-learning is different for students of color. Literature speaks to working with children of color in service (Dunlap, 2000) and to creating service-learning experiences on college and university campuses that serve underrepresented populations (e.g., historically Black colleges and universities and tribal colleges) (Boyer, 1995; Brotherton, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000), but speaks less to the experiences of students of color in the service-learning classroom, particularly how those students’ experiences contrast to those of White students.

One of the unspoken truths about service-learning is that it is a pedagogy that has traditionally targeted privileged students. The frameworks that guide how we shape and teach service-learning courses have often been about crossing borders and connecting across difference, with that “difference” mostly embodied by the community served (Mitchell, 2008). The reality of service-learning, especially as college and university classrooms become more diverse, is that the differences explored through service-learning are more often the lived experiences of students in our classrooms. Students who are participating in service-learning may often be from privileged backgrounds, but they may also have experienced the very concerns that we ask students to address through community service. How do we structure the curriculum of service-learning classrooms to address these perspectives?

Our understanding is that, in any classroom with diverse students making sense of service, understanding of service (those processes of engaging and acting with others in community-based work) is shaped by different kinds of consciousness. Although consciousness may be shaped by many dimensions of identity, this chapter focuses on race consciousness—or perhaps more descriptively, consciousness about racism. Two different types of consciousness affect the classroom and then manifest as several tensions in service-learning that affect White students and students of color differently.

This chapter aims to illuminate the experiences of students of color in service-learning classes by presenting challenges and concerns of traditionally underrepresented students in dealing and working with their White peers.
The chapter incorporates interviews with 10 students of color enrolled in a required service-learning course at a small public university. Our analysis is guided by a conceptual framework that employs DuBois’s (1903/1982) double consciousness alongside King’s (1991) dysconsciousness as a way of uncovering how a person’s understanding of racism may in turn guide and shape his or her approach to making sense of service-learning. What results are three tensions that affect the classroom and how students respond to the service-learning experience.

Double Consciousness and Dysconsciousness

This chapter draws on an understanding of two different types of consciousness—double consciousness (DuBois, 1903/1982), an understanding of self including race through the eyes of others, and dysconsciousness (King, 1991), a lack of awareness about race and racism, to make sense of the experiences of students of color and White students reflecting together on service. Although not all students of color bring a double consciousness and not all White students are dysconscious of racism—these differences in consciousness and understanding generally characterize different worldviews based on race, and they lie at the core of the tensions in learning from service explored in this chapter. These two types of consciousness generally inform different understandings about personal identity and beliefs about the social world and in particular about racism, privilege, and inequity.

DuBois (1903/1982) describes double consciousness as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” He continues, “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unaccustomed strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 45).

In classrooms with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, students of color are constantly reminded of how they are viewed by others when they hear White students’ comments (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Such comments, especially in service-learning, frequently reflect unexamined privilege and cast persons and communities of color as “problems.” In fact, service-learning is often defined in part as meeting the needs or problems of a community (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Because service-learning often sends White students who are unfamiliar with persons from backgrounds other than their own into communities of color defined as having problems, it is no surprise that White students reflect the contempt or pity described by DuBois. For students of color in such classrooms, DuBois’s (1903/1982) words ring true more than 100 years after he first wrote them: “Being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else” (p. 44).

Awareness of being defined as a problem by White supremacist thinking (hooks, 2003) while recognizing that the problem is White supremacist thinking is a mark of double consciousness. This double consciousness, when shared in classrooms with White classmates, presents opportunities for those classmates to develop critical understanding of racism, privilege, and how they benefit from both. Sharing such understanding of the world viewed through the lens of double consciousness, in effect, becomes a “service” for students of color who are responsible for addressing the “miseducation” (Dewey, 1938/1997) of their White classmates. Miseducation results in students who unquestioningly accept unjust norms, which include racism and White supremacist thinking, of larger society (Woodson, 1933).

Uncritical acceptance of racism is “dysconscious racism.” King (1991) defines dysconscious racism as “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness” (p. 135). Dysconscious White students are aware of racial prejudice and discrimination, but lack critical understanding of why such phenomena exist. For example, when presented with statistics on racial gaps in infant mortality, income, or educational achievement, dysconscious students see such problems “as a historically inevitable consequence of slavery or as a result of prejudice and discrimination” (p. 138). They locate the root of the problem in negative psychological or cultural characteristics of African Americans. They do not see “structural inequity built into the social order” and “fail to account for White people’s beliefs and attitudes that have long justified societal oppression and inequity in the form of racial slavery or discrimination” (p. 138).

Dysconsciousness is characteristic of many White students’ reflection on their service-learning experiences. By defining social problems in terms of those marginalized and oppressed and assigning responsibility for remedying such problems to the same population, White students shift problems and
responsibility away from themselves. As King (1991) notes, "The ability to imagine society reorganized without racial privilege requires a fundamental shift in the way White people think about their status and self-identities and their conceptions of Black people" (p. 136). The job of those facilitating reflection on service is not to prove to White students that they are racist, but to highlight how their thinking is impaired by dysconscious racism. As King points out, "Uncritical and limited ways of thinking must be identified, understood, and brought to their conscious awareness" (p. 140). This is where students of color, seeing the world through a double consciousness, provide a typically unrecognized service by helping White students gain such awareness.

In the following sections, we describe the resulting tensions—going home versus serving the other, responsibility versus privilege, and teaching to versus learning about—that emerge as students with double consciousness and dysconsciousness reflect together on service. Implications for service-learning and ways practitioners can capitalize on experiences and perspectives brought by students of color conclude this chapter.

**Going Home Versus Serving the Other**

As educators design service-learning experiences, the selection of community partners is an important part of the process. Students' community experiences will often shape their understanding of course material and impart new understandings of the communities and populations experienced through service. Students' prior experience with community service may be excited about the opportunities of working with a new or different population or be afraid of what they will see and experience. For students of color and students who have lived or grown up in the communities (or communities similar to those) identified as recipients of service, the opportunity to serve can similarly engender feelings of empowerment or resistance.

These feelings that emerge are just a piece of a tension that can result in a service-learning classroom. What does it mean when students are going home (to their own or similar communities) for the service experience? What does it mean when students entering those same communities for the first time bring their questions and concerns, often steeped with deficit notions and prejudice, back to the classroom?

The experience of going home for a student in service-learning may breed excitement and empowerment with the possibility of giving back to a community that nurtured and provided, as reflected in the comments of a Latina serving in a place very similar to her home community:

When I'm at [my service site] and I'm working in the Spanish class [helping women achieve literacy in their first language], I know that I'm doing it for my family. Like my mom who didn't get to go to school past third grade or my grandmother who still draws pictures and takes empty packages to the grocery store cause she can't write. [The service site] is like my kitchen table. (Interview, April 19, 2006)

The opportunity to participate in a community service experience where she could recognize and understand the people she was serving—believing that her work at the service site could be useful to members of her own family—encouraged her and gave her great pride in her service and in the community that provided this service for them. This excitement can be quickly tempered when a peer returns this enthusiasm with disdain, negative stereotypes, or fear.

The experience of going home may also trigger resistance for students in service. For students for whom the college experience is an escape or a step toward "getting out" of a difficult home situation, being asked or required to go back in the name of service may be a challenging experience that neither the student, course facilitator, or community partner is prepared to handle.

Students of color from economically privileged backgrounds may feel empowered or excited by the opportunity to work with people who share their racial identity but who have very different life experiences. However, these students may also show resistance, especially if they have class bias or unexamined stereotypes about inner cities and "urban communities," if they are concerned about being in communities where they fear community members may make assumptions about their abilities to interact that will be quickly disproved (i.e., they will be "found out"), if they carry fears about the community members they will serve, or if they worry that their peers will view them as "like" the community members they are serving. These are pressures of identity that frequently are ignored or underestimated in service-learning experiences.
Typical in the framing of service-learning courses is an assumption that the community is an unfamiliar “other” to our students. When educators frame reflections on service as if everyone is new to the community served and the issues encountered, students of color may feel their lives and experiences are being analyzed and criticized (they become objectified and/or exploited) or may feel a responsibility to defend their communities, to educate and correct misconceptions. At the service site, students who have experienced circumstances similar to those affecting the community may be troubled by actions and statements made onsite that negatively affect community members or make students from the campus look bad in the eyes of the community. Similarly, they may question the effectiveness of their peers at the service site—either those who look negatively on the community, those who purport to know everything about the issues encountered in service (because they’ve read about it), or those who are too afraid to truly engage with the community their service is aimed to address. An African American woman in service-learning suggests:

I know that not everyone grew up with addicts on their corners. But people like to pretend like it’s something that only happens in movies. People are so surprised when they see someone on [the street next to the service site] shooting up or coming down and they just freak out, but I’m like, “This is real. If you can’t face this part of your service what good can you really do down here?” (Interview, May 4, 2006)

The very dichotomy of server–served often positions college students as the altruistic heroes entering communities to help and fix them. Service-learning automatically privileges students as those with the knowledge, position, and power to respond to community problems and sometimes permits them to deny the problems that exist outside the communities they serve. In these kinds of situations, the community served becomes the site of difficulty, inadequacy, and concern, and the community not served is viewed as a point of aspiration (Donahue, Bowyer, & Rosenberg, 2003). These observations can lead to an opportunity to discuss differences between communities and to explore structural inequalities that create difference. The responsibility in these discussions is to ensure that conversations do not degenerate into stereotypes and blanket statements about wealth and poverty.

The idea of safety is another issue that illuminates this tension of going home. Service-learning positions the community where students serve as a place of “risk” where students need to be trained before they enter. The framing of service-learning experiences rarely frames the community served as a familiar place and certainly doesn’t recognize the places where students of color are unsafe, such as their own campuses or in the predominantly White and economically privileged college towns where they may be targeted by police, and the contradictions that may be produced for students of color. Students are trained to feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or on guard when entering the communities they will serve, so students who grew up in environments similar to the service site may feel that their upbringing is being disparaged. This is reflected in this comment from a Latina in service-learning:

Ugh! Sometimes the kids in our class just get on my nerves. They talk about how bad my neighborhood is—how dangerous—they don’t even know. It’s like because people around them don’t speak English and wear blue they are all of a sudden in the middle of a gang shootout. It’s fucked up, you know! ‘Cause a lot of us live there and our families are there and we know how the community looks out for each other. (Interview, March 17, 2006)

The questions raised about student safety and risk in service-learning are important conversations, but they must be tempered with recognition that no place is “safe for all” and that all communities have assets to be leveraged.

Responsibility Versus Privilege

Another phenomenon playing out in classrooms of students from diverse backgrounds reflecting on service is the tension between responsibility and privilege. Responsibility, on two levels, is a characteristic of many students of color in the service-learning classroom.

On the first level, responsibility refers to the sense of moral accountability for serving in the community, especially when students identify with a community or have roots in that community. The same moral accountability is evident in the classroom when students are reflecting on their service. When students of color hear comments by White students rooted in racism and stereotypes, many shut down or otherwise intellectually withdraw from
the classroom. But others feel a responsibility to challenge such misinformation. In that sense, these students become responsible for the education of their White classmates about race and racism. Similarly, when students of color hear comments that draw on unexamined assumptions and limited life experiences, they feel responsible for pointing out those assumptions and sharing stories about their own life experiences to counter those assumptions. Often students feel this responsibility because their instructors share the same assumptions and limitations as White and middle-class students and do not have the capacity to challenge racist and class-biased comments.

On the second level, responsibility refers not only to the accountability that students of color initiate, it also refers to a burden placed on them by instructors and classmates. In this sense, students of color are called to be accountable for explaining actions and values of communities about which White and middle-class students have little knowledge. This burden carries the danger of essentializing, or oversimplifying and narrowing, questions of race and making students of color spokespersons for explaining an entire group.

This second level of responsibility is a product of other students’ privilege, particularly the privilege that comes with being White. Privilege refers to benefits or advantages that accrue to a particular group. Being privileged means operating without being subject to the usual rules because of one’s special characteristics. White students are often unaware of the privilege that comes with their color and take whiteness as the norm. Students operating from such privilege may not, for example, understand that communities of color have experiences with police, teachers, and store owners different from their own. They may assume that anyone can travel, shop, or vote with the same ease they enjoy. Operating from a position of privilege, White students may ask other classmates to explain racial differences and then be upset or feel “unsafe” when those classmates point out their privilege or shift responsibility to White students for their own learning.

One comment by a student of color illustrates the idea of responsibility as a sense of moral accountability for serving in the community, especially the students’ own community:

I took this class because we have to, but I was excited at the same time because I knew I could have an impact. I knew that I would have the chance to help people see what was possible. Not everybody from neighborhoods like mine gets to college, not everybody from my high school graduated, you know? It’s like here’s my chance to show kids like me what it takes to make it. (Interview, December 7, 2005)

This student’s comment speaks to feeling responsibility for young people in a neighborhood like his own, a responsibility to make sure that young people like him also graduate from college. He does not see the young people he serves as “other” or “underprivileged.” He understands that his own life as a college student can provide a model for young people. He defines service-learning with an emphasis on making changes in the lives of young people. By contrast, students operating from a position of privilege might focus less on making a difference and more on fulfilling the requirements of service, tutoring for a set number of hours, for example. They might approach service as something from which they can learn much but not necessarily as a compelling part of making long-lasting change in the world.

Students operating from privilege see service-learning as an opportunity to learn from vicarious experiences of poverty or marginalization, not as opportunities to revisit their own lived experiences. As another student of color noted about her privileged classmates, “I get so frustrated. I mean where do these stereotypes about people on welfare come from? None of them has had to be on welfare. I bet none of them knows how hard it is to be on welfare” (Interview, November 10, 2005). This student points out how classroom discussions can often be forums where privileged students voice unexamined assumptions. In such contexts, students of color and poor and working-class students face the choice of remaining silent and mentally withdrawing from the class or teaching their classmates by sharing their own stories in an effort to challenge notions about the experiences of “others.” Both choices are unattractive: the first because it alienates students from the classroom, the second because sharing one’s life with others who may not have the capacity to understand it can feel exploitive, depleting, or even futile.

One student who chose not to share his life story reflected on his frustration with privileged classmates and his desire to see them reframe how they viewed problems in the community:

I don’t talk about being homeless because it’s my past and I want it to stay there. But I go down there [to the soup kitchen] and it comes back hard. . . . And when we’re talking in class people are like, “It’s so sad to see people like that,” but you know that they drive right past the homeless
guy who stands on that corner asking for food. It just feels hypocritical—like the people at [the soup kitchen] are the “good homeless people.” They need to get that homelessness is bad for everybody who has to sleep on the streets or in their cars. I want them to see it as our problem not just their [meaning the homeless people’s] problem. (Interview, November 16, 2005)

This student’s comment raises questions about whether service-learning transforms privileged students’ thinking or actions. He notes that, although privileged classmates might feel sympathy or pity for persons who are homeless, they are not necessarily moved to feel empathy or act outside a course’s service-learning requirements. This student also points out how poor and working-class students see social ills such as homelessness as something that is not separate from them. They define such problems as “ours” rather than “theirs.” Students from racially or class privileged backgrounds are more likely to see such problems as separate from them, as something that they might help alleviate, but ultimately as something that other communities, not the ones with which they identify, need to solve.

As students of color observe, White students experience discomfort when they move out of their circle of privilege. They note that, although their White and middle- and upper-class classmates might talk about feeling unsafe in some contexts, what they are really experiencing is discomfort. One student of color said:

There’s a big difference between being safe and being comfortable. I feel like most of the time when people in class are talking about being “unsafe” when they go into [town] it’s more about being uncomfortable. I mean you can hear it when they complain about how they were “the only person speaking English” or that “no one else looked like them.” I wanna say “... and?” [laughs]. (Interview, November 11, 2005)

This student’s comment sums up two aspects of the tension between responsibility and privilege: the lack of identification and empathy that White students feel with those they serve, and the frustration felt by students of color when they hear unexamined stereotypes. In addition, this comment illustrates how students of color operate with a double consciousness, understanding that the communities where they serve are safe while also knowing that White students will define them as unsafe when in fact White students feel uncomfortable moving out of their privileged spheres. It also illustrates the dysconsciousness of White students who do not understand their own privilege, who take their own backgrounds as the norm, and who feel threatened in a context that departs from that norm.

Teaching To Versus Learning About

Another tension we’ve identified emerging from race consciousness in the service-learning classroom is a phenomenon of teaching and learning. The literature about teaching in diverse classrooms frequently names the dysconsciousness of White students as evidenced by their “raceless” or “colorblind” discourse (Frankenberg, 1993) in the classroom. As a result of not seeing or not admitting to race and racism, students use language that evades racial difference and inequality based on race. Because such discourse fails to observe and question racism, it perpetuates race (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Helms, 1990; Marx, 2006; Tatum, 2007). Service-learning is designed to enhance students’ understanding of academic concepts through applied community work, so there is some (though undesired) expectation that students learn at the expense of the communities where they serve. Our concern, uncovered in this tension, is that White and economically privileged students also learn at the expense of their peers—students of color and those from communities that reflect the service sites. Students of color then bear the burden of redirecting colorblind classroom discourse.

The students interviewed in this research talked about feeling like their work—their real service—was in the classroom more so than in the community. Most plainly felt, in the words of the Latino student whose writing opened this chapter, “I do more service in this class than I ever do at my site” (Student narrative, collected in short response paper, October 17, 2005). Students of color often felt that their time in the classroom required them to teach their peers about what they were experiencing in the community—about the people in the community and about the realities of privilege and oppression as they affect real people in the world.

Students frequently named the classroom component of their service-learning course as the most difficult aspect of their experience. Feeling forced to fight or defend their communities, feeling silenced by the continuous voicing of unexamined stereotypes and negative labeling, feeling hurt by their peers’ lack of awareness and understanding—the classroom for these students of color became the space where they crossed boundaries and
borders. The classroom became the service site over the communities, which were often more comfortable and more familiar. Instead of experiencing the classroom as a site for learning, students of color were too often teaching their White and economically privileged peers.

An African American man in a service-learning experience shared:

When I’m at the site, it’s like I’m hanging out with my cousins. I see people who look like me, who dress like me, who know where I come from. In the class, man, I feel like I’m at a job. I just work all class long. I’m over it! You can only challenge someone’s stereotypes about poor people or black people or whatever, so many times before it gets old. And then, when I ask people questions, trying to understand where they’re coming from, they get defensive and shut down. It’s like they know that the way they feel is wrong—like it’s from misinformation or ignorance or media stereotypes or whatever—but they don’t want to have their opinions challenged. They just want to keep on believing what they believe. In some ways, I’m like, “Fine.” Because at least I know who they are and what I need to do to protect myself, but at the same time I wanna see some change and know that I haven’t wasted all that energy. (Interview, April 18, 2006)

This quote is reflective of an earlier tension of going home and expresses this student’s experience of the familiar in community tempered by a classroom environment filled with frustration and tension. He expresses a sense of exasperation with his peers and the process, but also a desire to see change—to know that his actions have not been in vain. For students of color in service-learning experiences, the classroom where their peers are learning about the community creates a site that requires them to be on guard, prepared to defend, and situated to forfeit their learning and process for the benefit of peers.

A young woman revealed her experience of feeling silenced in the classroom as students present perspectives that praise and demean simultaneously. “They just keep saying, ‘They’re so cute but they’re so loud!’ or ‘They’re so bad!’ And I want to shout out how racist that is, but I know they won’t get it” (Interview, March 16, 2006). Referring to her classmates’ comments about children they worked with in an after-school program, the student could not figure out how to explain to her peers how their comments troubled her. But revealing the tension more deeply is the student’s feeling or desire to “shout out,” which speaks to a responsibility to teach others but also to a silence on the parts of peers and instructors to challenge her fellow students on their comments.

Another reality of this tension is the understanding that students of color and students from troubled communities develop about the differences in their life experiences from many of their classmates. Students of color come to view their peers as unprepared for experiences in the community and question the effectiveness of their peers to work alongside community members. A Latina offers:

I feel like everyone chose [the after-school program] because they think that working with kids will be easy, but I know these kids and their lives aren’t easy. They go to the [program] for a reason, because it’s how they know they’ll eat today or because it’s too dangerous to walk home alone, or because it keeps them away from a mom or dad who beats them for a few more hours. People don’t even try to understand what’s really going on with the kids we work with. They just think they’ll get to play pool or basketball for an hour. (Interview, December 2, 2005)

This student’s comment speaks to the knowledge she brings of the community where she serves and what she sees as the gaps in knowledge of some of her classmates. By referring to students who “play pool or basketball,” she is questioning the commitment to social justice and to learning about the community by some of her White and middle-class peers. She sees these students as not taking their service seriously because of assumptions that all children’s lives are “easy.” The student is situated to teach her White classmates, but this involves additional “service” in the classroom that is often not recognized as equal to the service in the community.

**Implications for Teaching**

Teachers working in classrooms with students from diverse backgrounds can address these tensions in several ways. First, they can identify and name the tension and point out to students how White and middle-class experiences are taken as norms in classrooms, particularly at predominantly White institutions. They can help students develop empathy by asking them to have experiences in the community that are only about learning before they begin serving. These experiences may also be framed in ways that allow students to become more comfortable in the community where they will be serving so
that concerns about safety are appropriately shifted. For example, students can spend time in cafés, grocery stores, and reading rooms of public libraries. They can explore art and local history through community centers, museums, or parks and public spaces so that they can learn about the community, its culture, and its history.

Educators utilizing service-learning pedagogy must challenge their assumptions about the communities where students are asked to serve and the students in the classrooms they teach. They can challenge unexamined assumptions and stereotypes when they are aired in the classroom by asking questions such as “what do you mean?” and “how do you know that?” When instructors take this responsibility, they remove this burden from students of color and students from poor and working-class backgrounds. This requires that we know who our students are and recognize that, although some may be unfamiliar with service or the issues encountered in specific service experiences, there will also be students who know very well the situations we ask them to experience through service.

In facilitating discussions about the service experience, educators should frame conversations about the experience from an assets rather than a deficits perspective and include community members speaking about their neighborhoods (in addition to city officials or law enforcement) to give a more complete picture of the community. The inclusion of statistics and personal narratives to educate students about the areas where they will serve will illuminate the stories of institutional and structural injustice (or privilege) that perpetuate social and community concerns.

As students share their experiences in communities, it is imperative that facilitators challenge unexamined stereotypes and refute distorted claims as they are voiced. Taking every opportunity to speak to root causes so that blame is not placed on community members allows students to understand how issues, resources, and concerns that affect communities can oftentimes be traced to policies, traditions, and history that privileges some at the expense of others.

An alternative to large-group discussion, which often results in anger, frustration, or silence for students of color facing deficit notions about their (or similar) communities, is one-on-one conversations with students where they can confidently and confidentially voice their experiences, perspectives, and questions without fear. These individual conversations can also create a space for educators to challenge, correct, or question students and for students to express frustrations, challenge the pedagogy, and interrogate situations and circumstances in the classroom and community. Similarly, affinity group discussions (i.e., same race groups) can create an important space to recognize and reflect on double consciousness and challenge dysconsciousness. These dialogues require skilled facilitators who can represent the identities of White students and students of color (Zúñiga, 1998).

To mitigate these tensions, it is important to emphasize the opportunity, resources, and the lessons accessible to all students in the service environment. We should not prepare students for service experiences from a place of fear or risk, but instead showcase the assets and strengths of the communities where students will fulfill the service component of their experience.

As service experiences are developed, educators should seek different kinds of opportunities that permit students to see their previous experiences as assets. This means that service experiences in troubled communities and neighborhoods can be tremendous learning experiences for students familiar and unfamiliar with those communities. At the same time, we can explore service opportunities in communities traditionally viewed as privileged or “well-off” as another learning opportunity for students. For example, a service-learning course that wanted students to work in sites with people struggling with addiction placed students in a methadone clinic in an impoverished community and a private recovery center in a wealthy area of town. Although the experiences were very different for students, these experiences provided great learning opportunities in both sites. Students noted differences in police presence, race, class, parental involvement, and location (not just the community but where in the community) that allowed them to think more deeply about the story of addiction and how various factors shape the (de)criminalization of drug use in our society.

Conclusion

We raise these tensions because the demographics of our institutions are changing. Service and service-learning can no longer be framed as an experience of “giving back” or “giving to” people less fortunate than ourselves. Increasingly, our service-learning classrooms include students whose life experiences mirror those of the community members they encounter in service. We can no longer pretend that the community experience will be new or different or unfamiliar to all our students.
This chapter gives voice to students of color whose experiences are often missing from service-learning, both in scholarly literature and in classroom discussions typically dominated by White middle-class voices. The students quoted in this chapter offer an important critique of the way service-learning is traditionally framed and help us understand the ways in which service-learning is very different for students of color. We believe these students eloquently reframe for scholars and practitioners what is considered “service” to students of color.

Finally, we appreciate how these students complicate the distinction between service and learning. These students understand that service is not just something that happens when they leave the campus. Service, for students of color, can also be helping White classmates learn about the communities where they serve and challenging their peers to understand that White and middle class are not normative perspectives. Service-learning practitioners should honor the contributions students of color bring to the classroom but not expect that they will carry the responsibility alone.

References


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