Critically Engaged in a Predominantly White Institution: The Power of a Critical Service-Learning Course to Cultivate a Social Justice Stance

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Abstract

This article examines how a particular set of critical pedagogical strategies was used in a critical service-learning course to shift student perspectives and serve community partners. A self-study of a critical service-learning course that asked university students at a predominantly White institution to serve in urban schools was performed to ascertain how effectively critical service-learning may have addressed the weaknesses in traditional service-learning by (1) dismantling hegemonic discourses White students bring to the classroom and (2) engaging in service that would address inequities present in urban schools. By examining 2 years of data from student assignments, interviews with community partners, and course evaluations, this article argues for the efficacy of several pedagogical tools that can contribute to shifting the perspectives of White students as well as students of color.

Keywords: university partnership, critical service learning, race and racism

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ervice-learning, which the Association for American Colleges and Universities has recognized as a "high-impact practice" for university students, has been a largely White domain (Kuh, 2008; Seider et al., 2013). Enrolling mostly White students and taught by mostly White faculty, service-learning, Dan Butin (2006) has observed, "may ultimately come to be viewed as the 'Whitest of the White' enclave of postsecondary education. . . . a luxury available only to the privileged few" (p. 482). Because students engaged in service-learning are often serving low-income people of color, there is a danger that service-learning will reinforce the idea that White people are the givers of help but never the recipients, giving students an inflated sense of their ability to cause change in communities and a sense that communities do not have power to bring about change on their own. At predominantly White institutions, in particular, this mindset can have deleterious consequences. Courses that ask students to engage in service-learning in urban communities, in this context, can reinforce stereotypes, encourage deficit perspectives, and maintain a deep lack of knowledge regarding people of color, low-income communities, and/or urban spaces. As Mitchell et al. (2012) stated, left unexamined, service-learning led by White faculty and students can lean heavily on a pedagogy of Whiteness. This pedagogy involves "strategies of instruction that consciously or unconsciously reinforce norms and privileges developed by, and for the benefit of, white people in the United States. These norms and privileges are based on color-blind and ahistorical understandings of social problems in society where race is indeed a crucial factor" (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 612).

Critical service-learning, on the other hand, can counter such stereotypes and biases because at its core this form of service-learning is about creating a much more authentic and reciprocal relationship between a university and a community (Butin, 2015).

Moreover, critical service-learning provides students a historical, political, and social context, and engages them in addressing the inequities that led to the context in the first place. According to Kinloch et al. (2015),

> Critical service-learning should be guided by selfless collaborations of groups of people who are committed to both addressing identified community issues and seeking ways to eradicate forms of social inequalities that impact the economic, educational, social, and political choices. The connection between critical service-learning and social justice education cannot be understated. They both critique hegemonic discourses and practices that are at the root of injustice, and they both interrogate forms of oppression such as discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, and the various *isms* that exist in the world while acknowledging differences and diversities, inequalities and oppressions, at the same time that it serves as a conduit that meaningfully connects school to community and learning to active engagement. (p. 41)

This is easier said than done, as much of university-based service-learning is still steeped in volunteerism that keeps traditional power structures and roles in place, and often ignores the significance of race. As Mitchell et al. (2012) stated:

> Service-learning, lacking a critical focus on race, can reinforce socially constructed understandings of whiteness. The language of service-learning, "underprivileged" and "at risk" for example, can reinforce stereotypes based in white supremacy. Similarly, defining white, middle-class students as automatically and necessarily capable of serving reinforces white supremacy. (p. 614)

To disrupt the traditional service-learning course, and the ways in which it reinforces White supremacy, one must draw on a different set of pedagogical strategies (Kajner et al., 2013). One set of practices, Mitchell et al. (2012) suggested, comes under the banner of reflective practice, which allows students to understand and check their privilege, use an asset-based framework (Moll et al., 1992) when referring to service sites, and make race a central part of the discussion.

To that end, this article examines how a particular set of critical pedagogical strategies, as well as intentionality around discussing race and privilege, were used in a critical service-learning course to shift student perspectives and serve community partners. Through a self-study of a critical service-learning course that asked university students at a predominantly White institution to serve in urban schools, this article sought to explore how effectively critical service-learning may engage in the following: (1) dismantling hegemonic discourses White students bring to the classroom, (2) developing an asset-based perspective of urban communities, and (3) engaging in mutual partnership between university and community. By examining 2 years of data from student assignments, interviews with community partners, and course evaluations, this article argues that the course examined employed several pedagogical tools that can contribute to shifting the perspectives of White students as well as students of color. Although it constitutes early steps toward engaging deeply in social justice work, a critical service-learning praxis can benefit both university and community partners.

Background: Critical Service-Learning

Although service-learning courses and/or service requirements are commonplace at many universities, service-learning in practice can range widely from course to course and campus to campus. The experience can even vary within a campus or a course, and service-learning can reify stereotypes or disrupt them, depending on the type, level, and length of engagement. Espino and Lee (2011), for example, found that service-learning experiences could reverse or confirm stereotypes that university students held. For some students, a course in which White university students were asked to mentor young Latinx students awakened a political consciousness and desire to work for racial justice; for others, it reinforced the idea that students of color were not as capable as they were. Espino and Lee suggested that myriad factors influence the degree to which and the ways in which

students change throughout a service-learning experience, especially one focused on challenging racial stereotypes and educational inequity. Marichal (2010) suggested that students bring their own ontological experience to service-learning, which influences the impact of the service-learning in terms of civic engagement, which makes the impact highly dependent on the student. Thus, intentionality around working to reverse stereotypes has to be a goal of service-learning with White university students. As Pompa (2002) asserted, "In a society replete with hierarchical structures and patriarchal philosophies, service-learning's potential danger is for it to become the very thing it seeks to eschew" (p. 68). Even when the intention is to reverse hierarchies and stratified systems, service-learning can fail in these aims.

Critical service-learning provides a framework for teaching and engaging with community in order for faculty to work toward a "justice-oriented" experience (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) have stated, critical service-learning is about "placing an emphasis on community problem solving through critical thinking that raises questions about the roots of social inequality" (p. 90). Or, as Mitchell (2007) wrote, in what she describes as "social justice service-learning," this kind of service-learning helps students pay "attention to the political foundations of social matters, question the distribution of power in society, develop productive relationships between post-secondary institutions and their communities, and create social-change agents" (Mitchell, 2007, p. 104).

Proponents of critical service-learning argue that the work of service must make an impact on the community, and the benefits must be truly bidirectional. Butin (2015) went even further to explain that critical service-learning needs to follow a very clear set of "tenets for practice" which demand that the community partner clearly benefit from the service-learning project. These tenets are important in creating the structure for a critical service-learning project, but they do not help lay out a pedagogy for ensuring that students understand why they are engaging in the way that they are with the community partner. However, without a strong and explicit critical pedagogy, a critical service-learning project may not meet its own goals of teaching students about social justice. Consequently, I argue that critical pedagogy must be central to any critical service-learning experience.

Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy

Kizer and Jones (2014) asserted that critical service-learning does the following: (a) works to redistribute power, (b) develops authentic relationships in the classroom and in the community, and (c) takes on a social change perspective. To accomplish these goals, a critical pedagogy is essential. Kajner et al. (2013) began to describe the pedagogical dimensions of critical service-learning that must be embedded in any course that purports to provide a critical perspective to its students. They listed three essential elements: (a) disrupting power and co-constructing knowledge, (b) encouraging praxis through course assignments, and (c) reflecting on the social world.

These three elements of critical pedagogy are central, but as Mitchell et al. (2012) argued, not quite enough. They wrote, "The invisibility and normative privileges of whiteness shape service-learning and are reinforced by service-learning" (p. 615). Service-learning, even critical service-learning, can privilege faculty and students, who are often White, by engaging in a color-blind discourse that obfuscates the role of race, for example by using terms like "inner city." Such unconscious privileging is especially likely when a predominantly White university is partnering with a community of color in a service project. Thus, in addition to the practices mentioned by Kajner et al. (2013), a critical service-learning course should also (a) employ a pedagogy of race and privilege that presents an asset-based view of communities of color with which the students may be working and (b) cultivate a reflective stance among students. Much of the literature on critical pedagogy uses the elements described by Kajner et al. (2013) but leaves out the notions of race and privilege described by Mitchell et al. (2012). This article uses recommendations by both to create a new framework for analysis to understand how a critical service-learning course begins to address inequity and social justice.

Method and Data Collection

In the spirit of critical self-reflection (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006), this article uses a self-study method to examine

the impact of a critical service-learning course on its students, and how, in particular, it shifted their perspectives. With roots in phenomenology (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), self-study acknowledges that teaching practices and the subsequent analysis of these practices grow out of our ideological assumptions. Therefore, as Sullivan (2009) has suggested, "to understand one's practice, it is necessary to examine one's practice in relationship to the perspectives, biases and assumptions one may form as a result of one's historical, social and cultural context" (p. 339). From this perspective, we need to view individuals as always situated in their unique and intersecting social contexts and locations, which then affect the way we analyze and act in the world (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). In this regard, I acknowledge the larger university context and my own role in it, as well as the city in which the university is situated.

I am a White, female professor at a predominantly White institution (PWI) that suffers from a legacy of racism that has infected the campus with an unhealthy and hostile climate. Further complicating these dilemmas that many institutions of higher education face, my particular institution has hosted White supremacist student groups on campus, but has also had strong groups led by students of color who have demanded that the university deal with its problems around race and racism. Historically, the university sits on land that was a plantation during the antebellum period, and when it was founded, did not admit Black students. It became a teacher training institution for Whites until 1955, about 100 years after its founding. In 2015, the campus exploded in protest prompted by incidents of police brutality across the country. Students occupied the president's office to demand recruitment and retention of Black faculty and required coursework on cultural competence. Neither of these demands took hold; however, under a new incoming president, the university opened an office of diversity and inclusion.

With this larger context in mind, I wondered how my students' attitudes and beliefs were directly impacted. My institution is a PWI that purports to engage in service-learning programs through numerous courses across campus, but in many of them White students are not being asked to confront their biases or their social position. I wondered if critical service-learning could begin to pick away at the reproduction of White supremacy. Could it address the color blindness that Whites engage in to ensure "not knowing" about racism and White supremacy (Mueller, 2017)? How would this kind of class address the needs of Black and brown students at the same time?

In response, as a White female professor who had a relationship with students, as well as connections to local majority-Black schools and Black-led community-based organizations, I developed a course that would try to answer these questions and, in particular, develop White students' capacity for understanding who they were and shift their perspectives on race and racism as well as validate the experiences of Black and brown students. I thought that this would contribute to changing the campus culture and respond to the demands that the students of color were making on the university, as it is the duty of all faculty, I believe, to respond to this call.

Data were collected over four semesters to understand the impact of the critical service-learning course. I also included data from fall 2020 to update the data and to serve as a check on my original data set. Table 1 shows which data were collected.

Student assignments are described below, and were reviewed after the course was complete for themes that arose. University-generated student evaluations were examined after each semester, focused on the question "What did you like about the course/was most impactful?"

After IRB approval and data collection, I conducted a first round of analysis to detect emergent themes. I started with an open coding process using NVIVO software (Saldana, 2015). I generated a memo using the results of this process, which I shared with two of my community partners. Ultimately, my interest was to answer the following questions: (1) What pedagogical techniques have been central to shifting hegemonic discourses, in this case White students' perceptions of race/racism and urban schools and communities? and (2) To what degree can critical service-learning address inequity in urban communities and schools? Therefore, I followed the open coding process with a second round of analysis to detect the connection between the data and the frameworks of critical pedagogy and critical service-learning set out by Kajner et al. (2013) and Mitchell et al. (2012). I shared this second round of analysis with two community partners once again. This round honed the analysis further and made

Table 1. Data Collection			
Data source	**Time period of collection**	**Number of participants**	**Race/ethnicity of participants**
Online discussion board, Service-learning project, Reflection project, Student evaluations	Fall 2016–Spring 2018; Fall 2020	97	87% White 7% African American 3% Asian 3% Latinx
Interviews with community partner representatives	Spring 2018	3	100% African American

the conclusions that I drew more reliable and trustworthy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

A Critical Service–Learning Course: Race, Inequity, and Education

Race, Inequity, and Education is a critical service–learning course taught at a predominantly White university. Using the city in which the university sits as a case study, students study how racial inequity in urban schools came to be and how to combat it. As a central part of the course, students learn about urban schools and spend time in them, working with community school coordinators. The main expectation for the university students is to support a project that the community school needs. This is their service–learning project. The students are supervised by community school coordinators, who are often people of color from the neighborhoods that the school serves, for 30 hours to gain quality experiences inside and outside the classroom. To further express the desire for a reciprocal relationship, the university also hosts students from the schools and the service–learning students lead college tours, which are essential for K–12 students to begin imagining their postsecondary future.

The idea that students are expected to work in relationship with others, and not to simply volunteer, is made explicit early on. The following is taken verbatim from the syllabus:

> Students will not simply be completing service to the schools. They will engage in service–learning projects which require students to be participants in diverse settings, to require them to work with and

help people different from themselves, and to reflect on their experience and grow. In the end, students will see themselves as agents of change, and that their efforts might help minimize intolerance and discrimination while positively impacting and building community around them. This work will be the core of the course and will ask students to formally prepare, reflect throughout the service–learning experience and to make a presentation where they link the course themes to the service–learning experience.

The goal for the main service–learning project is that it supports and sustains the work of that school after the university students leave. The project centers around going to and working in the school under the supervision of a community school coordinator, who works with the students, helping them to understand the inner workings and contribute to the work of community schools. In addition to the service–learning project, students perform other assignments along the way that ask them to reflect on who they are while they are learning the course content about the history and current context of urban schools, structural racism, and privilege, among other concepts.

Findings

Using Kajner et al.'s (2013) description of the pedagogical dimensions of critical pedagogy for service–learning, as well as Mitchell et al.'s (2012) notions of race, privilege, and reflection, the following findings are drawn from student assignments and evaluations. The findings are organized

by the themes that emerged: (a) reflection on the social world, (b) encouraging praxis through course assignments, (c) cultivating a reflective stance among students, and (d) employing a pedagogy that presents an asset-based view of communities of color with which the students may be working.

Reflection on the Social World: Reexamining Beliefs About Racial Inequity and Developing a Reflective Stance

One critical pedagogical practice is reflecting on the social world, which is an important precursor to performing critical service-learning. To take a critical stance, to think about disrupting power and engage in praxis, first students need to interrogate hegemonic ways of looking at reality and reexamine taken-for-granted beliefs about urban education, urban spaces in general, and race. The course, therefore, begins with the question What comes to mind when you think of urban schools? Students answer this question before they go into urban schools, and during our conversation, I take copious notes. They respond, discuss, and feed off each other. A number of words come up frequently: unsafe, violent, chaotic, underfunded, diverse, disorganized.

After that discussion, I ask where their ideas come from, and whether it is experience or some other source. Frequently, students say that they have little to no experience in urban spaces, even students of color who grew up in suburban communities, so their impressions come from media portrayals. We unpack this so that students begin to see what reliance on media portrayals can do to their ideas and opinions. They begin to see how media can reify hegemonic discourse and ideology, distort their views, and imbue them with stereotypes around race and class.

Through this first third of the course, students learn about the larger social-political-historical contexts of redlining, the creation of the suburbs, the conditions of school segregation and efforts at desegregation, and inequity in school funding. They read histories of race and schooling, as well as personal accounts, like D. Watkins's *The Beast Side* (2015), watch videos, have discussions, and examine their own personal and family's choices of where to live and go to school.

By Week 5 in the course, one third of the way in, students are reexamining the ideas that they brought in with them in the first week. They begin their visit to urban schools and have done much more reading. The following is a post from the class discussion board by a student of color who is beginning to reflect on our discussions and readings in class:

> These readings were eye opening to me. The stereotypes of urban students not wanting to learn are not true. I have learned that the problem is not that they don't want to learn, it is that it is far more difficult to learn in urban schools due to the conditions that the students face and the extreme lack of funding that is needed to keep the schools in proper condition. Three billion dollars are needed to bring the buildings back up to standards!! Where is this money going to come from? It also appears as if the politicians are looking out more for themselves than they are for the city's students. They want to avoid backlash from the public for re-allocation or tax increases by delaying funding. We need politicians that are willing to confront problems and face the repercussions. In these readings, I saw all of what we have learned come together. I finally saw the connection between history and the conditions of urban schools now. (Student assignment, 2016)

This student is beginning to identify some of the structural problems that created the conditions in which urban schools exist today. This breakthrough is critical for undoing the stereotypes and biases that the students bring. Although such realizations are especially important for the majority White students in the course, they are also important for students of color, who often come from middle and upper middle class suburban backgrounds and who can have some of the same misconceptions about urban communities as White students. For White students, however, this critical reflection is especially important since they frequently embed their notions of the poor conditions of urban spaces in a racial context. They often talk about race as culture and use the language of "cultural deprivation" when referring to people that have to live in those conditions rather than recognizing the structures that have been set

up to produce those conditions (Moynihan, 1965). A White student wrote:

> With the communities mostly effected [*sic*] being of African American, low income, red lined neighborhoods, it's no wonder that they have been so disenfranchised by the state by lack of funding, lack of action, and lack of compassion. But what I, and what I believe most of the authors in the articles would agree upon, is how come they are just now getting attention? Where was the public outrage when school building temperatures reached almost 100 degrees? Where was the public outrage that these building[s] were nearly falling apart? Where was the public outrage when there were 30 students to one classroom with an ill prepared teacher? Why now? I am of course glad that these injustices are being seen on a larger scale and being called out because our children deserve better than what they have, but what does that say about the poor children who endured these conditions up to this point? (Student assignment, 2017)

Words of anger and disappointment come from White students just learning about the history of structural racism. Many of them have enrolled in the class not knowing the history of structural racism in how cities were formed, how school funding is meted out, or how intentional the role of racism was in setting up structures that benefit them. But by the end of the course, students have gained a more nuanced understanding of the ways race and class are implicated in how structural inequity is formed and reproduced. Students of color are familiar with structural racism; they feel validated in hearing it expressed in their university classrooms, and often would make connections to their personal experiences.

Most students become quite skeptical of dominant narratives about issues of race and urban education. In anonymous student evaluations at the end of the term, students made comments like the following:

> This class forced me to look at the causes of systemic poverty and how structural racism plays into that. (Course evaluation, 2016)

> Despite being uncomfortable at times, this course helped change my thinking, the truth is not always pleasant. (Course evaluation, 2018)

> It forced me to come to terms with . . . the benefits I have in my life based upon my ethnicity and up-bringing, opened my eyes up to the continued racism and inequity that we have today. (Course evaluation, 2017)

Although students were not forced to shift their perspectives by the instructor, most students experienced a major shift in their thinking: They reflect on the social world as they have learned it and come to understand it after their study. The course urges them to go through this process of critical reflection. Students' use of the word "forced" suggests that they felt compelled to confront previous understandings of inequity in new and more personal ways, acknowledging their individual role in maintaining inequitable systems.

In the course we discuss how power is in the hands of privileged people, and that they maintain that power through structures that reproduce their power and privilege. This is new for many students. They begin to come to a new understanding about their own privilege, especially those who are White, middle class and upper middle class students, as well as how the maintenance of that privilege contributes to an inequitable system. As one student wrote in one final project:

> This course taught me that we benefit in society but we cannot see it. We may not think we are racist, and we may not be willing to give up the privileges that come with being in the majority. So we are not doing anything about it. (Course evaluation, 2016)

It is confusing for some students to see that they wield power. Because of their privilege, many White students do not think about themselves as being part of a race or a social class group, so when they begin to, it is eye-opening. The readings and discussions enabled students to cultivate a reflective stance, to think about their own positionality, and to connect their experience to the larger social world. The course engaged in a critical pedagogy that set students up for a

critical service-learning experience. Before they went to a service-learning site and while they were there, they continued to learn from this perspective, and were able to experience the service differently, with a deeper understanding than if they did not engage in this way.

Students of color shift perspectives as well. This is impactful, and indicates how misleading it is to assume that Black and brown students have a singular experience or perspective. This student described herself as very knowledgeable about Black history and inequality in the United States, but she said:

> I learned so many lessons that I will carry on to my everyday life. It has encouraged me to take an active role in ensuring that our policies are no longer made to suppress black and brown people, but instead uplift them. This course has taught me to look beyond the surface and understand the "why" behind many patterns in this nation. Many patterns persist because of the way our system was founded. Everyone should investigate where they have some privilege in their lives whether it be class, race, occupation, etc. and figure out how to use it for good because everyone has at least a little bit of privilege. Being active and engaged in the fight is necessary to make a difference. Everyone must play a role if we want to see a change in the system. (Final student reflection paper, 2021)

Perhaps this kind of reaction grew out of the larger context of Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020 after the murder of George Floyd. Whatever factors may have influenced her reflections, her insight suggests that the critical pedagogy of this course was able to awaken students' desire to move beyond awareness to activism.

Frank Discussions About Race and Racism

As mentioned earlier, it is not enough to critique the social world; students need to have direct discussions about race, especially White students in a predominantly White institution. Throughout their experience carrying out projects in urban schools and reading about urban spaces, students learn about the two social worlds, one Black and one White, with unequal access to power but

that exist side by side. We examine the city of Baltimore, its history of racial segregation, and the legacy of enduring segregation. Lawrence Brown recognized this duality when he coined the terms "Baltimore's Black Butterfly and White L," referring to the physical shapes one can see on the map showing the population distribution in the city (Brown, 2016). Following this, we read D. Watkins's *The Beast Side*, a book by an African American man who reflects on his life growing up and observing these differences. Through such readings, students acquire the vocabulary to talk about phenomena that they did not know how to describe before. As one White student said about police brutality, after reading the book:

> D. Watkins outlines the various stressors people from the city face. I was able to just get a glimpse of many stories through D. Watkins' stories. They are surrounded by a structure that encircles them and continues the cycle of the social reproduction. To actually leave a dent and/or permanent change to the structure would mean an "economic and educational calculus" more complex and effective than the "self-styled saviors." (Student assignment, 2016)

While being struck by the structural racism that "encircles" Black communities, students are also impressed by Watkins's friends who show drive and effort. As Watkins describes in this passage:

> A guy who guts houses for $50 a day, a rack of uncertified tax preparers, many single moms with triple jobs, some freelance freelancers, infinite party promoters, squeegee kids, basement caterers, back alley auto mechanics, dudes of all ages selling water, and a collection of Mr. Fix Its. We are all American dream chasers, all trying to start our own businesses, all working our asses off. (Watkins, 2015, p. 22)

This particular section of the book teaches students about the assets of the poor Black community in Watkins's world, and describes a serious work ethic, deftly countering a stereotype that my university students often associate with Black people, especially poor Black folks. This text is quite impact-

ful, and through our guided discussion, university students, White and students of color, develop an asset-based perspective from it, which is essential before going into work in schools that serve a majority low-income Black and brown student body and community. The text helps them acknowledge how the structures of segregation, gentrification, and structural racism can coexist with the resilience, skill, and ingenuity of Black folks, including D. Watkins. My students of color are familiar with structural racism, but the realization that class and classism has impacted their view of urban communities is quite a shift and leads them to think about race from a more intersectional perspective.

Praxis: Modeling a Humility in Relationships

By the time they enter an urban school, students are primed with discussions of race, racism, privilege, and reflections on their social worlds. From there, we move to praxis, the idea of bringing theory into practice. The service project is the main way that students engage in praxis and apply what they have learned. To make their participation effective, I needed to teach students to develop a new understanding of how to engage in an authentic way with community, and to foster a mutual relationship, rather than an understanding of service as volunteerism like helping in a soup kitchen or a neighborhood park cleanup. Now that they had begun to see the humanity of low-income Black people, the goal was for students to understand service as working in an ongoing, respectful relationship in which they would take the lead from community partners. Consequently, one initial aspect of reexamining beliefs focuses on what service-learning is. In the course I teach, several readings are aimed at upending student notions of service. One particular reading that resonates with students is by Rachel Remen, in which she writes:

> Helping is different than serving. Helping is based on inequality, it is not a relationship between equals. When you help, you use your own strength to assist those with lesser strength. . . . People feel this inequality. When we help, we may inadvertently take away more than we can ever give them; we may diminish their self-worth and whole-

ness. . . . Helping incurs debt, when you are helping, they owe you one, but serving, like healing, is mutual, there is no debt. (Remen, 1999, p.8)

This is a powerful reframing for students because they had often not heard the distinction between helping and serving before. Even though many of them come to the university with some previous volunteer experience, the work that they have performed often falls in the category of helping, and they need to learn to serve.

However, it is not enough to read about ideas of mutuality, reciprocity, and building relationships. Students must live these concepts through praxis. Therefore, students assimilate the concepts through their service in urban community schools. Community schools are public schools that provide wraparound services, offer after-school programming, and work to engage families into the life of the school (Dryfoos, 2005). Each student spends 30 hours per semester in the school under the supervision of the community school coordinator. In this experience, the students co-construct a project that serves the community school in some way. Examples have included food pantry setup, organizing a drama club, organizing families to participate in school-related meetings and events, coordinating a health fair, setting up a community garden, creating a library of culturally responsive books, and designing and leading college tours at the university for K-12 students. These projects all respond to the needs of the community schools and are executed in dialogue with them.

The community school coordinator role is central to making these projects work, and to teaching the students the humility that they need to enter the space. The coordinators, who are all African American, are influential teachers for the university students. Students in the course spend many hours during the semester at a community school under the supervision of a community school coordinator who is deeply embedded in the school community. The school coordinator's impact is invaluable; they are not formally recognized as instructors in the course, but are given a stipend for their work. Coordinators do everything from seeking out new partnerships to conflict resolution between students to ensuring that families get counseling services to providing after-school programming for young

people. Through this work, they model how to form relationships and how to interact with youth, families, and communities. Through their actions, they teach the university students a set of practices that help them see how people, regardless of race and class background, should be treated. As one student of color recalled in her reflections:

> My school welcomed me with smiling faculty that seemed genuinely happy to have me. After signing in, I made my way to the coordinator's office. I could feel the warmth of her personality the moment I walked through her door, and after shaking hands and introducing ourselves, she took me on a tour of the school. As we made our way through the halls, she made sure to greet every hall monitor with genuine appreciation for their presence, and expressed her love and care for every student that we passed as if they were her own children. (Student assignment, 2017)

To describe working with university students, one community school coordinator said:

> The college students and myself have helped to build this library here. We worked together to create the library, because we don't have one here at school. We were able to collect about 400 books as a community partnership, and then we're able to get those books in the hands of kids, and not just any kind of book, but books that kids are going to read, predominantly books by African American authors that kids are familiar with, and I say that because most of the curriculum that you'll see in the city are not African American friendly in the sense of, if you have a population of predominantly African American students in the school or a population of Hispanic students in the school, then we want to be able to assign books [about] the African American experience as well as the experience of other folks as well. And I think that's a critical piece in how we can build our society in a better place so we're able to help one another and see one another as equals. (Community school coor-

dinator, personal communication, 2017)

After the service is finished, students come away with a sense of humility and a new appreciation for how mutual relationships might work. The coordinators expect and welcome the students each semester; the students understand that they need to listen and follow their lead. Often this results in a relationship that continues past the semester, where the students continue to work with the schools beyond the scope of the course.

Limits of the Findings

Although the study did show success in raising awareness among students and in addressing hegemonic discourses, it did not fully address the tenets that Butin (2015) suggested anyone claiming to perform critical service-learning ought to abide by. It will take more work and time to break down the institutional barriers that keep us constrained by semesters and hours, as well as more planning with partners to develop a closer teaching relationship. Furthermore, we will need to work harder to ensure that the schools are truly impacted and to document the ways in which this impact happens in order to show real reciprocity, in the way that Butin (2015), Kinloch et al. (2015), and others imagine. As of now, the study showed that the university students certainly have some impact on urban schools, but exactly how they impact is less clear.

Conclusion: Toward a Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy

The pedagogical strategies of reflecting on the social world and cultivating a reflective stance, combined with the explicit attention to race- and asset-based views of people of color, have been critical in shifting hegemonic discourses and attitudes among our predominantly White student body. Both White students and students of color gain a consciousness around their language and attitudes that reflect a social context in which they are a privileged and powerful group. White students begin to see that their privilege and power are at the expense of people of color. All students come away with an increased awareness of structural inequity, privilege, and the kinds of mechanisms that leave inequity in place. The findings of this study indicate that these practices need

to be made more accessible for instructors who want to engage in this work.

Although a critical service–learning course can achieve only so much in terms of addressing inequity, engaging in praxis helped to develop humility in university students that gave them the capacity to approach urban schools and communities in productive ways. Praxis has been essential for creating a relationship between the university and urban schools that is more reciprocal in nature and that acknowledges the need for ongoing, respectful work to continue. Through critical pedagogical strategies and praxis, the university students moved away from thinking of communities of color as always in need of White people's help to lift them up.

Finally, critical service–learning can be a real pathway toward meaningful change on college and university campuses and in their surrounding communities. In this new context in which universities are dedicating themselves to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, wherein many campuses are offering trainings and hiring staff to develop the capacities of faculty and students in DEI, critical service–learning can offer a helpful model for university students and faculty to work toward social justice and go beyond simple awareness of diversity issues to making real change on and off campus.

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