Chapter 1

Critical Service-Learning and Cultural Humility: Engaging Students, Engaging Communities

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ABSTRACT

Racial, ethnic, and cultural context impacts how communities perceive problems, and ultimately their perception of what is deemed helpful. Thus, a lack of awareness of these particularities can render service-learning efforts ineffective. This chapter highlights a 12-year service-learning partnership between a predominantly White, comprehensive, liberal arts college and the local Haudenosaunee community. Pedagogical strategies utilizing the Six Requirements (6Rs) of service-learning and informed by cultural humility act as a transformative way to facilitate student readiness to engage with the said community. Cultural humility is positioned as a process that transforms service-learning into critical service-learning, as it enhances students’ ability to engage in critical self-reflection, mitigating the toxic elements and empathic failures of uninformed service-learning efforts. This chapter contributes to more mindful service-learning efforts, challenging all to work with service-learning partners in a manner that keeps community voice and choice at the core of service.

INTRODUCTION

What happens when aspects of power and privilege play out within the context of service-learning? And, what happens when the acts of oppression that one intends to stand against are unintentionally undermined by a lack of awareness? While uncomfortable to consider, elements of power, privilege, and oppression

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are inherent in even the sincerest efforts to help, leaving communities of color contending with well-intentioned but unhelpful responses from outsiders (Deegan, 1990; Whilde, 2006). Furthermore, this sense of estrangement is compounded, as the historical experiences and contemporary realities of communities of color are silenced by the larger society. Because racial, ethnic, and cultural context impacts how communities perceive problems, and ultimately the perception of what is deemed helpful, a lack of awareness of these particularities can render service-learning efforts ineffective. To emphasize the significance of awareness, this chapter introduces the notion of cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) within the practice of critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2008).

Entailing a complex negotiation of difference, cultural humility is a process that requires scholars, professionals, and students to continually engage in critical self-reflection, actively work to bring power imbalances in check, and develop and maintain mutually respectful partnerships with communities (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Aligning with cultural humility’s cross-examination of self for the purpose of deeper relationships with “others”; critical service-learning calls for the interrogation of systemic and structural inequality. Consequently, this interrogation requires scholars, professionals, and students to question the role we play in maintaining oppressive social, economic, and political power distributions, for the purpose of developing authentic relationships (Mitchell, 2008).

Within counseling, therapeutic, and research contexts, the catalytic potential of cultural humility has been emphasized. Specifically, a cultural humility orientation in counseling and therapeutic contexts has the capacity to facilitate stronger working alliances, elicit more positive outcomes, and contribute to overall progress (Davis, Worthington & Hook, 2010; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Harris & Didericksen, 2014; Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington & Utsey, 2013; Tangney, 2000, 2005; Willis & Allen, 2011). Furthermore, within the context of cross-cultural qualitative research, a cultural humility approach was found to challenge researchers’ beliefs and assumptions that are shaped by power and privilege, develop mutual esteem between researchers and participants, and increase the prospects of a richer yield of data (Willis & Allen, 2011). Combined, cultural humility and critical service-learning are positioned as a transformative way to facilitate student readiness to engage with communities of color, specifically the Haudenosaunee people, also referred to as the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. While this chapter breaks new ground by integrating cultural humility and critical service-learning, doing so offers great promise to culturally engaging service-learning efforts, as students’ ability to engage in critical self-reflection is enhanced, mitigating the toxic elements and empathic failures of uninformed service-learning efforts (Deegan, 1990; Whilde, 2006). This chapter highlights a 12-year service-learning partnership between a predominantly White, comprehensive, liberal arts college in the northeastern region of the United States and the local Native American, Haudenosaunee community. As such, this chapter discusses the Native American experience of historical trauma and resilience, as the information provides students with the historical and contemporary contextual realities faced by Indigenous communities within the U.S. Pedagogical strategies utilizing the Six Requirements (6Rs) of service-learning and informed by cultural humility act as a transformative way to facilitate student readiness to engage with communities.

**BACKGROUND**

It is necessary to state that the authors understand cultural humility as an extension of cultural competence, with competence viewed as a foundation on which humility builds (Ross, 2010; Terrance, 2016). Moreover, cultural humility is viewed as a disposition that develops over time (Tangney, 2000, 2005;