Chapter 2
Challenged by Respect:
Rethinking Service-Learning on Native American Reservations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how service-learning programs offered by U.S. colleges and universities might partner with Native American communities on reservations. It reviews relevant scholarship on approaches to cross-cultural learning, such as the Authentic and Culturally Engaging (ACE). It provides background for the participating partners in a current service-learning program. It examines issues affecting cross-cultural service-learning on reservations in light of ongoing historical, social and cultural trauma. It addresses pedagogical issues unique to Humanities (Religion) service-learning programs. It provides a description of various strategies used in the program that implement service-learning and learning theories. Throughout the chapter Native American voices and scholars serving as community partners for this specific program offer critical perspectives on pedagogy and partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Without critical reflection on the racial and cultural self and its social construction and pervasiveness in experiential reality, the goals of cross-cultural service-learning education cannot be met. For White U. S. students and teachers who are engaged in service-learning programs in Native American communities and reservations, this requirement creates a variety of challenges masked as privileges. More will be said about these challenges later in this chapter, but it should be recognized that White privilege—uneearned privileges and advantages conferred on White Americans and not on persons of color—acts as an invisible veil that Euro-Americans may not view as a cultural system (Sue & Sue, 2013), creating unique problems for effective and meaningful service-learning with Native American reservations.

Because human beings are cultural beings, Whites often assume that the ideal values of Whiteness are shared with non-dominant cultures (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2013). Yet, in the words of Vine Deloria,
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Jr. (Yankton Sioux), "There is no emotional unconscious that Indians and non-Indians share that can be tapped on behalf of American Indians, insofar as they are people, like other people. Their sufferings are historic and communal" (Deloria, 2003, p. 25).

Without critical racial and cultural identity work, White Americans seeking partnerships with Native American communities and organizations will fail to develop reciprocal, collaborative, and empowering partnerships. At worst, they will perpetuate the trauma of Euro-American colonization. Edward Valandra (Sicangu Lakota) (2005) asserts that the greatest challenge to mutual and reciprocal partnerships “is that our colonizers—with whom we have sometimes developed close relationships—fail to see themselves as perpetuators or agents of the status quo” (Valandra, 2005, p. 42).

The purpose of this chapter is to identify effective multicultural teaching strategies for cross-cultural service-learning on reservations. These strategies are demonstrated to be effective here not through measured outcomes for students and communities alone but rather because they facilitate collaboration between oppressed communities and their historical colonizers. This chapter is not simply an empirical or theoretical analysis of effective service-learning pedagogy and practice. It is an exploration of multicultural relationship-building on reservations as well as the accompanying challenges.

The chapter will describe an undergraduate cross-cultural, study-away, service-learning program with the Pine Ridge (Lakota) and Wind River (Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho) reservations. A literature review will engage relevant Identity Development theory, Service-learning models, the Authentic and Culturally Engaging service-learning approach, Transformative Learning theory, and Indigenous Education. A background of the program as well as brief histories of the Lakota, Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho peoples will provide context for subsequent sections. Six issues relevant to service-learning on the reservation will be examined: White privilege, Trauma, the Reservation, Imperialisms, Sovereignty, and Respect and Reciprocity. A selective description of the service-learning program and pedagogical strategies employed will give future program leaders an example of a cross-cultural service-learning experience. Throughout each section, Native American scholarship and research will help focus and refine dominant culture theory and pedagogy. A closing comment about the pedagogical approach to the challenges discussed and their meaning in light of the value of respect and practice of reciprocity will conclude the chapter.

The author is aware of the limitations of this chapter. First, it is written from a Euro-American, dominant culture perspective. It seeks to guide dominant culture service-learning pedagogy into empowering partnerships with Native American communities. The irony of this chapter lies in this point: it seeks to dismantle White privilege through relationships with persons and communities oppressed by White privilege, while acknowledging that the process will be lengthy and involved for both the colonized and the colonizer (Valandra, 2005, p. 49). Second, it does not provide data on measured benefits and harms to the community. Because this service-learning program is primarily designed as a civic or social engagement program, the author hopes to generate qualitative data about measurable benefits and harms in the next three years.

At this point a word about terminology is needed, specifically as it applies to naming and describing people groups. In this chapter, indigenous peoples found in the United States will be referred to as Native Americans. Many indigenous persons prefer to be described as Native American or American Indian. These terms are found in federal documents, laws and institutions. Some prefer the terms “Indigenous person” and/or “Indigenous American.” The Native American Journalist Association states that both “American Indian” and “Native American” can be formally and respectfully used when speaking of indigenous peoples in the United States but that tribal names are the most accurate when speaking of