

DePaul-ACU Service Learning Conference



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My Goal:

- To discuss the chief challenges/impediments that students encounter in having a transformative and liberatory service learning experience.
- To discuss and share strategies to overcome these challenges.

My Arguments:

1. Service learning that is heavily focused on symptoms rather than those societal factors that give rise to the conditions that people face runs the risk of furthering inequality, and leaves students as they are, with their biases unchecked.
2. Service learning that does not seek to eradicate the problem, but instead, settles for a peaceful coexistence with inequality strips the experience of its social justice content.

Social Justice Definition:

- A commitment to equal access to wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.
- So often what we refer to as social justice is not social justice.
 - Engaging with people to bring them into conformity with Western logic, furthers inequality.

A little about me and the service learning experience:

- My affinity toward service learning at DePaul
- My courses:
 - Service Learning:
 - PSC 282: Black Political Organizations in the Post Civil Rights Era;
 - Service Option:
 - PSC 218: African American Politics
 - PSC 328: The Politics of Urban Education
 - PS 329: Poverty and Public Policy

My Influences:

- Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
- The Civil Rights Movement:
 - Doug McAdams, *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*
 - Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*
- The frustrations that Dr. Martin Luther King confronted in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

FREIRE'S CENTRAL ARGUMENT:

- Education is always a political act. It can be used to maintain the status quo or it can be used to bring about social change.

According to Friere, education either:

- Functions as an instrument to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system (the market driven system) and bring about conformity, or
- It functions as an instrument in the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATORS:

- Progressive educators help students to reach *conscientizacao* (**conscientization**).
 - Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness--in particular, awareness of oppression, of being an object in a world where only subjects have power.

Doug McAdams, *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*:

Three factors that are critical to social change:

1. Political Opportunity
2. A Change in Consciousness, and
3. Organizational Capacity

McAdam's recognizes the dangers of elite participation.

Aldon Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change

- Recognizes that the Civil Rights Movement was an indigenous movement and that indigenous people have the capacity to order their own lives.

The frustrations that Dr. Martin Luther King confronted:

Excerpt from a "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.

Key questions to ask ourselves:

- How does service learning problematize injustice, or seek to eradicate those factors that give rise to intergenerational poverty or other societal ills?
- Are we complicit in the ways that power and powerlessness is replicated?
- Do we interrogate society clearly and forcefully to our students?
- Do we interrogate our own privileges, positions, assumptions, and gaps between what we profess and what we do?
- Do we have a real stake in the game? Are we taking risk to make people feel uncomfortable in their comfort?

If you're not apart of the solution, you're apart of the problem

- Service learning-- most often positions us to help, but it's often a one way street that establishes a clientele relationship, and leaves power firmly entrenched.

The challenges/impediments that students encounter in having a transformative and liberatory service learning experience:

- A historicism:
- Cognitive dissonance
- Faculty, who often have an erroneous understanding of history, as a precursor to contemporary socioeconomic circumstances.
- The gravitational pull of white supremacy and capitalism
 - Donald Trump and the rise of white nationalism-- An international phenomenon.
- White Fragility, white guilt, and fear of the “R” word.

Left unchecked, the consequence is:

- Service learning experiences that promote the savior complex, and mere volunteerism.
- “We’re helping them to be like us.”
 - Undermines the goals of service learning and its association with social justice.

What must be done?

Professors and institutions must commit to:

- Exploring alternative interpretations that problematize their cherished beliefs about fairness and equality;
- Training and critique of the service learning project;
- Critical reflection– their own and their student's; and
- Challenging students to examine their assumptions, understanding that tension is unavoidable.

Some Examples of the Critical Reflection Process:

- Establishing some basic ground rules:
 - We will respect confidentiality.
 - We will share time equitably to ensure maximum participation.
 - We will listen carefully **and not interrupt**.
 - We will keep an open mind and be open to learning.
 - We will not be disrespectful of the speaker even when we do not respect their views.

Let's talk about race!

Themes:

- Who are we as individuals and as a nation?
 - Are we who we say we are?
- Where are we-- what are the challenges of our time?
- How did we get here?
- Where do we want to be – what are our societal goals?
- What are we willing to do as individuals and with others to make a difference?

Source: exercise adapted from chapter 3,

<https://clintonwhitehouse2.archives.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/PIR.pdf>,

Who are we as individuals and as a nation?

Centering Questions:

- What is your racial, ethnic and/or cultural background?
- Did you grow up mostly around people similar to you?
- What are some of your earliest memories of coming in contact with people different from you?
- How has your upbringing impacted your views about people different from you?
- Cite a memorable racial experience that has impacted you positively or negatively?

Where Are We?

Centering Questions:

- How much and what type of contact do you have with people of other races or groups?
- Is it easier or harder than it was a few years ago, to make friends of other races? Why is that so?
- How would you describe the overall state of race relations in our society?
- What are some of the underlying conditions affecting race relations in our society?

Where Do We Want to Be?

Centering Questions:

- If we had excellent race relations, what kinds of things would we see, hear and feel in our society?
- What are the main changes that need to happen to increase understanding and cooperative action across racial lines?
- What are some of the helping /hindering forces in our society?
- What things have you seen that give you hope for improved race relations?
- What are some steps we could take to improve race relations where we are: in our neighborhood? In our workplace? In our organizations? In our schools? In our community?

What are we willing to do as individuals and with others to make a difference?

Centering Questions:

- How can you connect with others who share your concerns?
- Should you continue and expand this dialogue, get more people involved? How could we do that?
- Are there other issues and concerns that you should address using dialogues?
- What will you do to ensure follow-up?

Pertinent questions for reflection papers:

- The strategy that the organization uses to carry out their mission, i.e., oppositional, withdrawal, clientage
- The major activities of the organization.
- Whether the day-to-day work of the organization reflects the organization's mission.
- How your contribution/work reflected the organization's mission.
- The initial stereotypes that you held about the clientele the organization serves and the neighborhood where the organization is located.
- The accuracy/inaccuracy of stereotypes that you held.

- Any initial anxiety that you had about your placement site.
- The characteristics and conditions of the neighborhood where your site is located:
 - Who lives there, i.e., race, gender, class?
 - Where do people work, shop, etc.?
 - How do people get around?
 - Can you imagine growing up there?
 - How different might your life have been if you had grown up there.
 - The types of businesses are in the neighborhood.
 - Are people owners or renters?
 - Various issues and challenges that people in the community face.
 - How did conditions get this way.