Chapter 3
Don't Touch My Hair:
Culturally Responsive Engagement in Service–Learning

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ABSTRACT

Myriad studies on service-learning agree on the benefits of service-learning for students. Because projects are designed with the needs of students and institutions in mind, the experiences of the Black communities served are seldom highlighted nor are the intricacies of the multiple relationships addressed. Voices of marginalized groups especially the Black communities—the community that is the focus of this chapter—needs to be incorporated in authentic and intentional ways to advance transformational service-learning for all involved. This chapter begins to examine issues and opportunities for best case scenarios for service-learning projects in Black communities.

THE FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Although students and service-learning educators highlight the values of service-learning in general and see these efforts as opportunities to advance communities, questions abound regarding the process and the impact on those communities (O'Grady, 2000). Black communities are concerned about projects that render them "invisible" partners in problem-solving efforts (Calderón, 2003; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). Further, they are concerned about practices that do not utilize the insider knowledge their voices bring to the table. This chapter explores the intersection between service-learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and Black communities. In this chapter, the students engaged in service-learning are characterized as the Servers and the community is identified as the Served (Henry & Breyfogle, 2006). Freire's theory of critical consciousness informs the chapter.

BACKGROUND

Freire's scholarship has had a significant impact on service-learning, particularly service-learning for societal transformation. In his pivotal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire* (2014), asserts that students are not merely vessels to be filled with knowledge and that education should engender critical consciousness. Only then he argues can we break down institutional and individual vestiges of oppression. Freire coined the term "banking" to describe a pedagogical method in which students operate as agents of their own subjugation. He argues against the "banking" concept, asserting that students have something to contribute to the creation and sharing of knowledge, thereby making education more of a dialogue and the eventual vehicle for liberation rather than oppression. An interpretation of Freire's work in service-learning is that the Servers are partners with the "Served." This means the Served are not to be viewed from a "banking" approach to problem-solving in which they are merely vessels to be filled with "superior" solutions by those who have the privilege and access to resources, but that they, too, have something to contribute from their insider knowledge about their communities and to become co-creators of knowledge (Cohen, 2012; Freire, 2014). Critical consciousness in service-learning facilitates societal transformation through group dialogue, participatory action, and empowerment between the Servers and the Served.

"The" Black Community and Diversity

Black communities are not monolithic—they are varied. Understanding the diversity within the Black community is essential to service-learning design and approaches. Aspects of diversity in the Black community come from dimensions of a difficult social, political, and cultural history (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988). Black diversity also comes in the form of culture, language, and national origin. Although viewing the Black community from the perspective of skin color may suggest to some a singular group, even in this instance there is diversity based on whether one identifies as belonging to two or more races.

Black community diversity also entails variations based on regional, urban, and rural differences, and in some communities, age and socioeconomic status (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988; Du Bois, 1903). Some may prefer to be referred to as African American, and others prefer to be characterized as Black. The individual needs to be asked. Yet others do not wish to be identified by a single racial label and may prefer bicultural, mixed, or biracial. These contexts are critical for the efficacy of service-learning projects in Black communities. This chapter utilizes Black in referring to communities of people of African descent.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, PROBLEMS

There is much miscellany of opinion about how Black people characterize their ethnic background. The individual needs to be given the opportunity to express their preference. Few studies have examined the impact of service-learning programs on communities (Donahue, Boyer, & Rosenberg, 2003; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009) and the role that communities play in determining the goals of service-learning programs. There is a consensus on the value of service-learning and the potential to bridge communities. However, for service learning to attain the goals of refining student learning, cultivating civic-minded citizenry, and addressing Black community needs, the insider knowledge and voices of Black communities must

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