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Mindful Practices to Interrupt White Supremacy in Service Learning Education

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Service learning initiatives are employed at many universities to enhance community relationships; however, in practice, these well-intentioned initiatives may reinforce social divisions and propagate white supremacy culture. Contemplative learning practices and mindful pedagogies provide educators with an opportunity to evaluate their own social positions and help students confront biases and prejudices. This paper discusses the history of service learning in the United States and suggests ways in which liberatory pedagogies and mindfulness practices can be a means for educators to interrupt white supremacy and deconstruct bias in university service learning settings.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has long operated as a leadership training ground for the privileged few. While much has changed since the days when higher education was legally restricted to the white, male landed gentry, American urban elite colleges and universities remain less racially and economically diverse than the communities that surround them (Ashkenas, Park, & Pearce, 2017). One way many elite institutions seek to improve their community relationships is through service learning programs, in which educators require students to participate in structured community-based volunteerism as a part of their course work. This well-intentioned effort can have the unintentional effect of perpetuating the elitism and community othering that it seeks to break down. This article explores how faculty might use contemplative learning to interrupt white supremacy in the service learning classroom.

Historical racial inequality is woven throughout institutions of higher education yet often rests just out of sight. As educators, we have a professional responsibility to directly consider this distressing history and its current legacy, and to interrogate how our own conscious and unconscious biases pervade our classroom environments. Reflective practice is one way to explore the linkages between personal backgrounds, assumptions, and values. Bolton (2010) argues that “reflection and reflexivity are essential for responsible and ethical practice” (p. 5), allowing for an increased capacity to examine the alignment (or lack thereof) between values and practice. This is particularly important for those of us working in service learning fields, as our students are carrying the pedagogy of the classroom out into the community. We have a particular responsibility to interrupt the “pedagogy of whiteness” (Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012) that pervades our field. Regardless of our personal backgrounds, we bring attitudes, biases, epistemologies, and assumptions to our work; incorporating a deep practice of reflection and reflexivity can help us to continuously examine our identities and positionalities in the same way we expect our students to do. When we can bring self-aware and mindful subjectivity to our work, we can incorporate it as an asset within our learning environments.

Both authors of this paper are white women with significant class and educational privilege. This paper is based on the thesis of one of the authors, advised by the other, wherein we explored the history of service learning and recent research into mindfulness and bias, followed by the development of a curriculum designed to serve as a starting point for developing the willingness, skills, and aptitudes to interrupt the pedagogy of whiteness. While the curriculum component of the thesis project is outside the scope of this article, here we explore the implicit transmission of underlying attitudes and dominant cultural views in service learning education and suggest strategies to interrupt the attitudes of white supremacy in service learning education.

Notes on Language

Language and terminology are important foundations for shared understanding, and therefore it is useful to begin with some definitions.

The following terms bear further definition, which are offered here to provide background on the writers' intent. These definitions are not intended to shut down further dialogue; readers are invited to disagree or respond at will.

Service Learning, Community Engagement, and Engaged Scholarship

Hatcher and Bringle (1997) define service learning as "a type of experiential education in which students participate in service in the community and reflect on their involvement in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content and of the discipline and its relationship to social needs and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (p. 153). While the terms "service learning," "community engagement," and "engaged scholarship" all have nuanced differences and specific importance, here they will be used interchangeably to mean a transdisciplinary learning environment in which academic work and community-based volunteering are combined with intentional reflection for the primary purpose of deepening a student's understanding of the academic material and community dynamics.

White Supremacy, White Privilege, and Pedagogy of Whiteness

White supremacy has traditionally been understood as active racism, or the conscious belief that white people are superior to those of other races, especially Black people, and should therefore (continue to) dominate society. Okun (2001/2016) posits that white supremacy culture is a system of cultural characteristics "used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group" which, as pervasive cultural touchstones, can be exhibited by people of any background in ways that unintentionally privilege the dominant culture over other cultural understandings. White privilege, then, is the result of the unearned benefits bestowed upon those who are phenotypically white. As a white feminist scholar, McIntosh (1988) defines white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports,

codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (p. 188). In fact, the power structures that uphold and privilege whiteness demand that white people not see them/ourselves as "an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture," but rather that they/we see only "an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 189). In other words, white supremacy culture no longer relies upon actively racist white supremacists to exist; the passive acceptance of white privilege and attribution of these benefits to individual efforts rather than structural inequality is sufficient to perpetuate it.

Pedagogy of Whiteness

It is important to note that neither white supremacy culture nor the pedagogy of whiteness require any overt racial bias to persist; they can be upheld by people who value diversity, equity, and inclusion but who have not yet done the inner work to recognize how the dominant culture has seeped into their praxis.

Educator, Instructor, Professor, Facilitator

Though there are very real differences between the educational roles of faculty and staff in higher education, and in the pedagogical expectations and supports that each receives, for the purposes of this paper we use the term "educator" to refer to anyone who has a curricular or co-curricular role facilitating classroom-based student learning in service learning or community engaged higher education programming. Many of those holding educator roles within US-based institutions of higher education have themselves been taught in classrooms that uphold the pedagogy of whiteness and mimic the values of the heteropatriarchal white supremacy culture, particularly since "holistic, student-centered, integrative forms of educating still remain in the margins" at most academic institutions (Nopora, 2017, p. 188). While it may be normal to perceive these conditions as normal, as with white privilege, once the veil is pulled back, we must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 188).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is “an umbrella term used to characterize a large number of practices, processes, and characteristics, largely defined in relation to the capacities of attention, awareness, memory/retention, and acceptance/discernment” (Van Dam et al., 2018, p. 36). These practices and processes can be formal exercises, like a regular meditation practice, or reflect an orientation toward quotidian activities; Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment” (2003, p. 145). Thich Nhat Hanh says that mindfulness “shows us what is happening in our bodies, our emotions, our minds, and in the world” (2008, p. 6); he also sees it as a process that allows us to avoid harming ourselves and others. For educators, mindfulness can be developed both as a personal practice of reflection and a pedagogical orientation. Mindfulness studies is a rapidly growing field that involves the exploration and evaluation of a wide variety of contemplative practices, as well as important critiques of how mindfulness is taught, practiced, and marketed in a variety of modern settings. Without going into detail about these critiques, this paper will treat mindfulness as an umbrella term meant to describe reflexive and contemplative practices and processes that orient the practitioner toward greater awareness in the present moment.

“We” and “Our”

At times in this paper, we have chosen to use the term “we” so as to not remove personal responsibility in responding to the historical inequality and the legacy of white supremacy in higher education; a more analytical “one” or colloquial “you” removes us from those being implicated and runs counter to the pedagogy and praxis of this project. Unfortunately, any time there is an “us,” there is by definition a “them”; we have thus tried to use these terms lightly.

THE STORY OF SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning, as a distinct field in higher education, traces its origins to community engagement work by historically white higher education institutions in the 1970s. Campus Compact was founded in 1985 by the

presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities in partnership with the president of the Education Commission of the States. According to the Campus Compact website, these leaders “shared a concern about the ongoing health and strength of democracy in the United States and believed that higher education could be [a] more effective contributor to the sustainability of a democracy with more robust support structures for community engagement” (Campus Compact, n.d.). Since that time, two of the founding schools have identified and taken steps to address their complicity in the slave trade and the continued legacy of that historical injustice in educational and income inequality that impacts the Black community (Slavery & Justice, 2006; Georgetown University, 2015); Stanford was founded 20 years after the Emancipation Proclamation and thus escapes a direct link to the institution of slavery, yet University founder Amasa Leland Stanford supported the exploitation of Chinese workers and the enslavement and genocide of California’s many Indian tribes (White, 2016; Briscoe, 2017).

Campus Compact continues to be a field leader in service learning and to encourage deeper campus-community relationships to advance educational equity. At the same time, the story they and other field leaders tell about their own origins incorporates a pedagogy of whiteness. Many historical educational and community leaders in various communities of color created approaches to community development and engagement that far pre-date service learning yet remain invisible in the literature of the field. Moreover, many contemporary scholars, activists, and practitioners in various communities of color have developed praxes that meet the definition of service learning but are not recognized in the field. This is the legacy of appropriating and obscuring the contributions of communities of color that upholds the normalization and privileging of whiteness in the United States today.

Service learning is a community engagement pedagogy that combines “learning goals and community service in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good” (Bandy, n.d.). The literature on the history of service learning largely ignores the roles and contributions of people of color in the field, particularly those who have directly challenged the power structures that lead to disparities of wealth, power, and access. In the history of Black education, segregation and the

legacy of slavery led to the development of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities created throughout the former confederacy by the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Expansion, the Freedom Schools during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and political education programming by the Black Panther Party in the 1970s. Chicano and Raza studies began in the 1970s, an emergence of Mexican-American scholars seeking to connect their work and their lived experiences. The attribution of the emergence of the field of service learning to a group of elite college leaders in the 1980s is emblematic of the pedagogy of whiteness.

Historical Roots of Service Learning

Bocci (2015) conducted a historiography of service learning to “explore how these historical narratives represent people of color, what they include and exclude, and how these representations and inclusions/exclusions may reinforce or challenge [w]hite normativity in service-learning” (p. 5). Bocci explored seven widely cited documents that presented an overall history of the philosophical underpinnings and practices of service learning, and found that two of the documents had no explicit references to people of color; “only three of the seven historical narratives mention individuals of color by name, and they reference far fewer of them than they do [w]hite individuals” (2015, p. 7). In the texts which specifically identified individual leaders of the service learning field, one document identified 33 “pioneers”¹ of service learning prior to 1985, only four of whom are people of color; another references 37 scholars, practitioners, and educators “whose work has influenced the development of service-learning’s philosophy and practice,” but only three are “people of color and non-Anglos” (Bocci, p. 7). In the web document chosen as the first Google search result for “history of service learning,” 10 of the 11 people named are white (Bocci, pp. 6-7). Two additional documents identify 36 leaders in total, none of whom are people of color. The invisibility of contributors of color to the foundational pedagogy of service learning would be sufficiently problematic to raise alarms. But Bocci fur-

¹ The language of pioneers is inherently a settler/colonial terminology, referring to the first people of Western European ancestry to explore a particular area, usually already populated by indigenous people. It is telling and troubling that the field of service learning chooses this linguistic convention.

ther found that when people of color are referenced, it is through vague allusions to the civil rights movement; alternately, they “are relegated to the role of ‘served’ or ‘needy’ (or are ignored completely)” (p. 8). In the absence of counternarratives about either structural inequality or historical (and continuing) systemic racism, this “may reinforce the perception that service-learning is designed and practiced by White people on or on behalf of people of color” (Bocci, 2015, p. 10).

Digging slightly deeper, a rich tradition of pedagogical methods that would meet the definition of service learning are present in communities of color. In the US American South, the pedagogy of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities spoke directly to racial inequality, as did the Freedom Schools of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the West Coast development of the field of Chicano/Raza studies (later broadened to ethnic studies) emerged from community-engaged scholarship and action research; the Black Panther Party also included community education. Stevens (2003) names several African American leaders who saw education of the Black community as having an imperative component of service and could be considered pioneers of early service learning.

Oden and Casey (2006) bring a unique perspective to this analysis, as both were members of the Black Panther Party and both subsequently earned Ph.Ds. and worked in service learning programs at Oakes College, UC Santa Cruz (p. 3). They directly map the origins of modern-day service learning onto the consciousness-raising and community-organizing efforts of the civil rights period from 1954 to 1974. In particular, they identify the Black Panther Party as providing “a vision and praxis for challenging the racial and political order in the United States...by articulating Marxist-Leninist-Maoist approaches to revolutionary theory and also by creating a community service apparatus that challenged the race, class, and gender oppression in the inner cities across the nation” (Oden & Casey, 2007, p. 5). It is easy to see why this radical foundation would be deeply threatening to powerful institutions, including colleges and universities, and why it would be tempting to extract and depoliticize these actions. Oden and Casey (2007) note that “when political consciousness is combined with community service, it not only meets a need in the community, but it also helps the volunteers transform their

ideas about their community and the world" (p.11). To truly embrace this political awakening is to turn a critical lens back on our own institutions.

Oden and Casey (2006) argue that the theoretical framework of service learning should include not just volunteerism, but critical thinking skills; the "approach should examine the multiplicity of elements that produce social injustice in the United States" (p. 13). They connect the 1989 Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning, and the 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program. The Wingspread Principles were "developed in the idyllic setting of Wingspread in the rural Midwest, away from the inner-city problems of the poor and people of color" (2006, p. 7), funded by the Johnson Foundation in Racine, Wisconsin, and considered the fundamentals of ethical service learning today. The revolutionary Black Panther Party Platform and Program directly implicates capitalism, colonialism, policing and the carceral state, and demands freedom, liberation, and universal access to basic needs for all Black people. Both documents emphasize the importance of community self-determination of needs, mutual commitment, increasing responsibility, and a commitment to the common good, yet the Wingspread Principles do not racialize their perspective or challenge practitioners to look at the source or root of social inequality and injustice.

In parallel to Bocci (2015) and Oden and Casey (2006, 2007), Garcia (2007) calls attention to the "little known and largely unacknowledged early history of Chicano/Latino/Raza studies in community service learning" (p. 208). This field of study emerged from field work and action research by Chicano/Latino graduate students in the 1970s who felt the need to connect their personal experiences in community with their scholarship; finding no research on Mexican American women, Garcia had her students in a 1972 UC Berkeley course called *La Chicana* turn to the community to collect data on "labor, education, family life, gender relations, social activism, history of settlement, and Latin American revolutions from the perspectives and experiences of women" (p. 209). This "activist research in service to the community" (Garcia, 2007, p. 209) was supplemented by class discussions, data analysis, and dialogue on findings and emerging issues. Importantly, Garcia notes the embedded reciprocity of contribution to community in return for their

stories, reflections, and experiences. This focus on community not only linked the classroom to the community through service conducted by students but also grounded the research agenda of the classroom and the campus in community-identified needs (Garcia, 2007, p. 209). Now a full professor teaching in the community service learning model, Garcia sees the importance of first-hand experience and “a critical bottom-up perspective [as] an effective device in helping students in ethnically mixed classes from various academic majors to see with different eyes from different vantage points” (p. 215).

In summary, while the history of service learning as a formal discipline often leaves out the contributions of leaders of color, the underpinnings of the discipline have a long history in the self-organizing and serving of communities of color. Service learning often focuses on assimilating other communities into the dominant culture, without a critical reflection on the history of those whose points of view are incorporated actively into the pedagogy. This makes sense for white practitioners, who “are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 189). Ignoring this history while appropriating its praxis is part of what leads to the accusation of service learning as a pedagogy of whiteness.

SERVICE LEARNING AND THE TRANSMISSION OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Service learning can be seen through both a traditional lens, which emphasizes direct service “without attention to systems of inequality, and a critical approach that is unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50). Traditional programs emphasize direct service, with reflection primarily tied to the impact on the practitioner and recipient of service rather than systems that impact them. This approach may reinforce a dichotomous view of students (often whiter and wealthier than the communities in which they work) as contributors and communities (often composed of people of color who are less wealthy than college campus populations) as passive recipients of service. This binary thinking is a characteristic of white supremacy culture (Okun,

2001/2016) and contributes to an othering of the community beyond the campus walls and students who come from it. In contrast, a critical approach draws on the historical roots of injustice and brings a systemic analysis to the work (Mitchell, 2008). A systems approach is critical to moving beyond diversity and into inclusion. Diversity alone does not rectify a systemic imbalance of power; in fact, it “often implies different but equal, while social justice education recognized that some social groups in our society have greater access to social power” (Warren, as quoted in Mitchell, 2008, p. 56). This can be quite challenging to the systems in which higher education takes place. After all, as Mitchell asserts, a “critical service-learning pedagogy not only acknowledges the imbalance of power in the service relationship, but *seeks to challenge the imbalance and redistribute power* through the ways that service learning experiences are both planned and implemented” (2008, p. 57, emphasis ours).

Because, according to Mitchell et al. (2012), service learning courses are being largely taught by white faculty and most students in them are “white, middle class, traditional age, college students who are not also juggling jobs, debt, and family responsibilities” (Butin, as quoted in Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 512; see also Green, 2003), there is a particular concern that service learning programming will continue to perpetuate this dichotomous view of “us” as privileged (racially and economically) college students and “them” as community members in need. Mitchell (2008) hypothesized that these dynamics can lead to a lack of classroom participation from students of color and students who have been ostracized by the practices of a culture of white supremacy within higher education. She observes that “students of color...know that while expressing sadness falls within the boundaries of accepted classroom discourse, anger—and particularly anger from a person of color, does not,” thus leaving “students of color...unable to express what they are thinking, feeling, and know in a class discussion, and instead, express[ing] nothing at all” (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 623). hooks (1994) brings in an economic class dimension to this classroom dynamic of politeness, noting that students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds “equate loud talk or interruptions with rude and threatening behavior,” while “those of us from working-class backgrounds may feel that discussion is deeper and richer if it

arouses intense responses” (p. 187). (Note that hooks includes herself as an actor in the classroom with the word “us”—more on that below). Mitchell (2008) further identifies this as a pedagogical decision-making process for all students that is based on “the perceived needs of white students” (p. 619), and which assumes that “students do not always have knowledge from or experience working in communities of color” (p. 619). This again underscores a sense of not belonging or being othered for students of color and/or students from low-income backgrounds. In classroom settings, there is an opportunity to do reflexive work as a class in establishing new community norms that incorporate the perspectives of students from different communities, rather than unthinkingly reenacting deeply embedded practices of white supremacy.

In the United States specifically, it is crucial to note that the continued existence of settler-colonial culture depends upon the invisibility of Indigenous peoples, as it is difficult for settlers to accept the ways in which they benefit from the processes of elimination and assimilation of these same people (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 9). Tuck and Yang (2012) identify the depth to which “the invisibilized dynamics of settler colonialism mark the organization, governance, curricula, and assessment of compulsory learning” in the United States (p. 2). For example, even the phrase “pioneers in the field,” used in this paper and throughout the literature on the history of service learning, has a genocidal/colonial underpinning recalling that “for the settler to make a place their home, they must destroy and disappear the Indigenous peoples that live there” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 6). Tuck and Yang assert that, while immigrants accept or agree to work within local epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies, settlers “become the law, supplanting indigenous laws and epistemologies” with their own cultural norms (2012, pp. 6-7). They differentiate between the role of settler, those who migrated of their own volition, and slave, those who were brought against their will—but ultimately the erasure of Indigenous peoples depends on the complicity of all non-Indigenous people as colonizers. This invisibility means that even social justice activists using a liberation framework get caught up in the settler mindset: the language of the Occupy movement is understandably critiqued as Indigenous people are currently living under a sustained occupation, and the

idea of a redistribution of wealth is a reinforcement of a settler mindset that “camouflages how much of that wealth is *land*, Native land” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 23). Tuck and Yang’s call for decolonization of indigenous lands and all natural resources is not metaphorical; they are literally calling for a repatriation of “*all* of the land, and not just symbolically” (p. 7). This frames service learning as a continued occupation and erasure of Indigenous sovereignty. As Tuck and Yang note, decolonizing is always troubling. While it is certainly valuable to diversify the texts we incorporate into our classroom and to expand our own learning about different communities, cultures, and histories, we believe that disrupting the roots of this historical inequity requires a deeper, and uncompromisingly contemplative, approach.

LIBERATORY PEDAGOGIES

Liberatory pedagogies described by Friere (1993) and hooks (1994) reposition the educator as a facilitator of co-learning, in an environment that requires vulnerability from both the educator and the student. This vulnerability can be supported through practices of mindfulness, reflection, and meditation which help illuminate inner beliefs and encourage integrity between values and practice. Specifically, recent research suggests that the practice of metta meditation may result in a reduction of racial bias (e.g., Lueke & Gibson, 2015). Sable (2014) notes that in educational environments, learning activities to encourage mindfulness can include “meditation, structured contemplation, journal writing, mindful listening, reflective inquiry, and dialogue” (p. 4). The literature offers some important guideposts on how to incorporate meditation, reflective writing, and consideration of identity into a liberatory, anti-racist pedagogy.

Davis (2003) posits that an education which “lacks relevance to the students’ lives and to their experience outside the school...ultimately causes them to reject the education offered” (p. 246). Relevance includes not only the usefulness of the material taught, but also the spirit in which it is offered. Are students in the classroom considered to be subjects, or objects? Is their life experience considered a valid way of knowing, or is the dynamic that the instructor holds all knowledge and the students are merely receptacles? Michelle Hite (2015) notes that introducing contemplative practices to students is one way to make their education relevant

to the materiality of their lives, and therefore transform the possibilities for subjectivity in classroom spaces:

(Re)introducing students to the possibilities of being enlivened by one's own company and finding value in the cultivation of a rich interior life expands their chances for living well. Implementing strategies in our classrooms that call for students to reflect on the ways individuals, groups, and generations of people have intentionally chosen novel ways of living in the world expands the likelihood of students using such models. At the very least, students learn to recognize diverse modes of living. Such awareness can certainly inform how students become involved in the learning process. (p. 50)

Cultivating students' self-awareness skills is, then, foundational to the project of bringing students into authentic dialogue with themselves, their peers, community members, and instructors.

Freire (1993) refers to the process wherein knowledge is "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" as the banking concept of education (p. 53). This oppressive ideology undergirds the Western education system and is what most of us who work in higher education have ourselves been marinating in for many years. hooks (1994) recognizes that "professors cannot empower students to embrace diversities of experience, standpoint, behavior, or style if our training has disempowered us, socialized us to cope effectively only with a single mode of interaction based on middle class values" (p. 187). Berila (2004) notes that mindfulness practices enable students to maintain an embodied classroom presence, and that

[t]his skill is critical... for classrooms that teach about diversity issues, such as women's studies, ethnic studies, sociology, LGBT studies, and peace studies. These disciplines teach their subject matter not just as objects of study, but also as social systems in which we all participate in various ways. If students are to really reflect on

their roles in these systems, they need to cultivate the tools for recognizing and understanding their internal and external reactions to that realization. (p. 56)

Because service learning programs enable students to engage with diverse communities and social systems, this attention to interactions between self and other is particularly key.

Liberatory pedagogies are a balm to the wounds caused by the trauma of being rendered invisible, having experiences negated, and being presented with “objectivity” as the highest aspiration of most disciplines when it is clear that each individual’s experiences and cultural expectations shape our perspectives. These experiences, identities, and positionalities shape even the questions we ask and that which we accept as given. It makes sense that there is resistance to liberatory, democratic pedagogies even in higher education institutions that are actively talking the talk of diversity and inclusion. In a field where the demographics of students can change far more rapidly than the demographics of tenured professors, it is all the more important for educators to reflect upon the impact of their pedagogies. hooks (1994) states:

[M]ost of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal. This has been just as true for non-white teachers as for white teachers. Most of us learned to teach emulating this model. As a consequence, many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject—only multiple ways and multiple references. (pp. 35-36)

College instructors are provided remarkably little support on effective strategies for teaching and learning and are “regrettably ignorant about the choice and use of pedagogical methods which are suitable for an education that relies more and more on higher level cognition and interpersonal abilities” (Cowan, as quoted in Davis, 2003, p. 249). hooks (1994) states that in her own educational experience, “it was rare—ab-

solutely, astonishingly rare—to encounter professors who were deeply committed to progressive pedagogical practices” (p. 17). Calls for more diversity and inclusion in the choice of sources and authors can be seen as a challenge to the veracity of the Western canon, which currently heavily features what hooks terms “great white men” (p. 37). This can be destabilizing for those who deeply identify with the material upon which they have based their long careers. In attempting to bring a transformative pedagogy to Oberlin College, hooks found that not just educators but also administrators “were more disturbed by the overt recognition of the role our political perspectives play in shaping pedagogy than by their passive acceptance of ways of teaching and learning that reflect biases, particularly a white supremacist standpoint” (p. 37). Turning this lens onto our own practice can dramatically weaken our deepest epistemologies, calling the idea of objectivity itself into question and thereby implicating the foundations of both beliefs and practices. The opportunity that this subversion presents is a space for an alternative, more inclusive epistemology and pedagogy.

As an alternative to dominant approaches, Freire and hooks propose a liberatory pedagogy that respects life experience, multiple ways of knowing and seeing, and the value of conflict. Freire (1993) defines liberation as “a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 60). A liberatory classroom is a co-creative space shared by an instructor and the students, where both are bringing their own contributions and both are learning together. This is a far more vulnerable space than most educators are used to, and a far more responsible space than most students have been asked to step into. This practice of freedom can be a transformative and healing experience for all who choose to take it on. hooks (1994) posits that “[a]ny classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. *That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks*” (p. 21, emphasis ours). It also requires more facilitation and coaching skills from instructors, as they are no longer simply all-knowing authorities imparting their knowledge to the empty vessels of their students. Instructors who have developed their own mindfulness practice, with the support of mindfulness teachers and organizations that special-

ize in contemplative practices for educators, will be better-equipped to support students in the co-creation of liberatory classroom and service learning spaces.

Additionally, when the illusion of objectivity is shed, it becomes clear that educators are bringing their own conscious and unconscious identities, experiences, assumptions, and biases into the classroom. Fortunately, there are practices that can help educators to become more aware and explicit about their own positionalities and expectations and to hold their beliefs more lightly. These practices are highly applicable to a service learning classroom, where we strive to decenter the needs of the university and recenter the needs of the community. We can embody that approach pedagogically by decentering the role of the educator and recentering the roles of all individuals as co-learners within the classroom.

REFLECTION AS PEDAGOGY

An ongoing mindful reflection practice is a key component of any service learning or community engagement curriculum. Bolton (2010) suggests that reflexivity and reflection are “the pearl grit in the oyster of practice and education” (p. 9). In other words, the process of reflecting is what allows students and educators alike to make *meaning* from *information*. Freire (1993) insisted that reflection was a necessary precursor for systemic shifts, as deep reflection on injustice mandates action. Since service learning is a form of learning by doing, the philosophy that undergirds it traces its roots back to educational philosopher John Dewey (1907), who at the turn of the last century noted that hands-on activities were an important part of keeping students “alert and active” while at school, and gave them a sense of self-efficacy that made them better contributors to society (p. 27). This recognition of the importance of direct experience in making meaning led to the development of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation; (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb argues that learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (as cited in Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). People at different stages of their lives and learning cycles may have different levels of openness and receptivity to this

transformation of experience, but encouraging students to engage in practices is one way of generating greater openness to change; encouraging reflection, specifically, opens up one mechanism within which this transformation may occur. However, rather than thinking of this process as a repetitive cycle or a Möbius strip (Bolton, 2018), we prefer to think of reflection like a spiral; each time one completes a cycle, one is on new ground with a different starting and ending point. The process of incorporating reflection into practice is a continuous process of learning and learning about our own learning.

Hatcher and Bringle (1997) define reflection as “the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives” (p. 153). This purposefulness differentiates reflection from rumination, and parallels Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) definition of mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment” (p. 145); in this regard, reflection and mindfulness go hand in hand, sharing a non-judgmental openness to experience. Effective reflection for learning is a distinct pedagogical tool, and many educators have neither received guidance in how to craft intentional reflective activities nor participated in them (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997, p. 154; hooks, 1994). Asking educators to incorporate reflective practice requires pedagogical support and buy-in to both the learning and the incorporation. And to lead effective reflection for students, educators should commit to practicing it in their own work as well. This subverts norms of higher education that objectify instructors as solely intellectual beings, “denigrat[ing] notions of wholeness and...encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the roles of professors” (hooks, 1994, p. 16). Loughran (2002) asserts that many other professions have accepted that practitioners must deepen their own awareness about how they do their work to maintain an ethical practice (p. 34). Loughran further notes that reflection “is important in sustaining one’s professional health and competence and that the ability to exercise professional judgement is in fact informed through reflection on practice (Day, 1999)” (p. 34).

As one of Bolton’s (2018) students noted, reflection “is not a cosy process of quiet contemplation. It is an active, dynamic, often threaten-

ing process which demands total involvement of self and a commitment to action. In reflective practice there is nowhere to hide" (p. 42). It is this discomfort and call to moral imperatives that creates such resistance to reflection; it is uncomfortable to be implicated in that which becomes visible upon reflection. Friere (1993) and hooks (1994) both assert that reflection is a critical process of deepening awareness of injustice and inequity, after which one feels a call to engage in addressing it. This reflective process will look different depending on the educator's identities, social position, background, etc., as both privilege and oppression involve complicated intersectional dynamics (Crenshaw, 1991). White educators in particular will find they have work to do in unpacking the ways in which they benefit from systemic white supremacy culture and in which they may, even when well-intentioned, be contributing to the oppression of students, colleagues, and community members who occupy more marginalized social positions. This is true even for those of us who have been doing this work for decades; like any practice, resisting the dominant culture requires continuous attention and engagement.

Bolton (2010) further asserts that most of our cultural systems rely upon people behaving as unquestioning cogs in a machine, and that "reflective practice and reflexivity are transgressive of stable controlling orders; they lead cogs to decide to change shape, change place, even reconfigure whole systems" (p. 7). For all of their lofty values and ideals, higher education institutions (and we who exist within them) are quite dependent on the dominant paradigm. To encourage practices that challenge the structures of the systems, and perhaps even the systems themselves, is a frightening prospect. Bleakley (2000) expresses concern that reflection will turn practitioners into self-marveling narcissists, distracted from "noticing the world around us and the needs of others, which is an outward attention, not an introspective taxis" (p. 411). However, this argument does not differentiate between purpose-driven reflection and aimless rumination, and gives very little credence to the human capacity to entertain differing perspectives. There is a pedagogical framework to effective reflection that helps limit the potential for this slide into ineffective paralysis in the world of ideas.

Reflection is commonly used within service learning to anchor the learning of students, but it is not an expected part of the instructional

process for educators. To lead effective reflective activities, one must invest in one's own learning as both a participant and a practitioner. Indeed, learning to teach something new is itself a form of experiential learning which is improved by engaging in reflection. Cowan and Westwood (2006) found promising evidence that university educators using reflective journals similar to those they required of their students had improved capacity to organize and support the reflection of their students. Effective reflection exercises have (at least) five components: linkage between learning objectives and experience; guidance about expectations and methodology; regular scheduling; an invitation for feedback and assessment (beyond mere grading); and opportunities to explore, clarify, and refine values (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997). Hatcher and Bringle hypothesize that effective reflection will not only deepen student learning, but will also help faculty find greater professional satisfaction and a more engaging and dynamic teaching style.

It is the purpose of effective reflection to illuminate the inner workings of one's mind, and thus to light the path toward effective, values-driven action. Through reflection we analyze concepts, evaluate experiences, and form opinions. Critical reflection provides us with the opportunity to examine and question our beliefs, opinions, and values. Reflection involves practices like observation, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning and new knowledge. Using Hatcher and Bringle's (1997) definition, critical reflection requires a connection to specific learning objectives. We can apply a simple "What? So what? Now what?" framework to our own pedagogical practices. What happened during our instruction? What were our expectations? Our observations? How was our experience different from our expectation? How did we learn about the experiences, learnings, and needs of our students? Because of this, how might we modify our instruction? Developing these skills as a point of practice helps us build the fortitude to be able to respond effectively when we confront things like racial bias or a lack of understanding of structural inequality in our students...or ourselves.

As educators deepen their/our own reflective practice, they/we will find that the positive impacts parallel those enjoyed by students, who of-

ten incorporate reflective practices learned in service learning programs into their own professional work (Mitchell et al., 2015). A long-term practice of reflection allows people to know themselves and to understand their identity and positionality in the communities they inhabit; over time “they recognize the moral and ethical responsibility they have to use that capacity for the good of society (Colby & Damon, 2010; Hatcher, 1997; Sullivan, 1988, 2005)” (Mitchell et al., 2015). Mindful attention in the moment, without judgment, can provide an opportunity to move beyond analytic understanding into embodied experience. Reflective practice gives a way to build an openness to what is, which also creates a potential for fresh perspective, receptivity to change, and engagement with a deeper wisdom.

CONCLUSION

While widely accepted leaders of the field of service learning often attribute the field’s origin to the growth of volunteerism at elite colleges and universities in the United States, this origin story excludes the contributions of many scholars and leaders of color. This is one aspect of a pedagogy of whiteness that pervades the fields of service learning and community scholarship, which often present students as contributors or subjects and community members as recipients or objects. This pedagogical approach further excludes those students who feel more resonance with the communities they are from than with those in which they find themselves in the college environment, and fails to account for the complexity of the lives of today’s college students. Much of this pedagogical approach can be attributed to the academic experiences of today’s educators, who may have been taught within a rigid framework that did not invite vulnerability, curiosity, or critique. Incorporating mindfulness and reflective practices into daily living helps educators to remain conscious of their/our own beliefs, experiences, and values, and to notice when their/our behavior is out of alignment with their/our values. Mindful educators are then, in turn, better-prepared to foster contemplative and reflexive practices with the students who will be engaged in educational and service learning projects. These practices help bolster a liberatory approach to education that allows for the co-creation of service learning communities that interrupt white supremacy culture and

create space for educators, students, and community members to arrive and work together as whole people in search of collective liberation.

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