Service-Learning:

Intercommunity &
Interdisciplinary Explorations

Mac Bellner & John Pomery, Editors

PREFACE

For a decade, Indiana Campus Compact, through its Faculty Fellows program, annually has selected a small group of faculty from higher education institutions across the state to spend the year working together as a class, developing as a community of scholars with a particular interest in the scholarship of engagement. Each class of fellows is responsible for, among other requirements, designing and at least initiating, if not completely implementing, a group project that may contribute to the scholarship of engagement. These projects have taken various forms and resulted in a variety of products: an evaluative survey of the Faculty Fellows program itself, a curriculum guide for faculty who want to host service-learning workshops among their peers, the first-of-its-kind annual student conference on service-learning with sessions presented *by* students targeted for an audience *of* students, and development of new models for assessment of the campus climate for service-learning and of student learning outcomes based on service-learning experiences.

The class of 2000-2001 chose as its project to solicit, from former fellows as well as their own class members, chapters for a book that would explore the many facets of the service-learning experience from a variety of disciplines, levels of practitioner experience, and orientation to service-learning and the scholarship of engagement. The book is not intended to be an exhaustive collection of experiences, nor was there an assumption that each chapter would argue completely different, though salient, points. However, the similarities and differences in response to the charge to write a chapter articulating what one would want other faculty to know about the potentially powerful impact of service-learning on teaching, student learning, scholarship, and community problem-solving have taken on a definite cohesiveness. The book has emerged as one that can be read in its entirety, or one chapter here and there, and still afford the reader an informative experience. Though the chapters had been submitted over the span of three years, it all began to come together with the interest of Dr. Phylis Lan Lin, executive director of the University of Indianapolis Press. Dr. Lin saw in the book its potential as a reader for a planned international symposium on service-learning sponsored in collaboration with the University of Indianapolis and the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, and she subsequently granted the authors the platform from which they could speak. The academic year of 2005-2006

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Jayne R. Beilke
Ball State University
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Whose world is this?
The world is yours, the world is yours
It's mine, it's mine, it's mine
Whose world is this?

> Nas (1994)

Introduction

As defined by critical theorists, critical multicultural education requires the development of a critical consciousness, or *conscientization*. The elements of critical consciousness include dialogue, problem posing, and the exploration of generative themes such as race, class, and gender. Although critical multicultural consciousness is difficult to achieve within the confines of the university classroom, a collaboration between university students and non-profit, youth-serving, community agencies can be a powerful catalyst. This paper describes an on-going partnership between university education majors enrolled in a multicultural education class and the local Boys and Girls Club. It draws upon student reflective journals to illustrate the process of developing critical multicultural consciousness and the potential for praxis (change).

Muncie Boys and Girls Club

The Muncie Boys and Girls Club is located in Industry, one of Muncie's historically black neighborhoods. Industry neighborhood was the site of the Ball Brothers glass factories that produced canning jars during the Progressive Era. In 1886, the discovery of natural gas deposits drew the industrialist Ball Brothers from New York to Muncie and ushered in glass manufacturing throughout east-central Indiana. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, the natural gas deposits were exhausted due to the lack of conservation (Lynd and Lynd, 1929). Manufacturing firms relocated, but a town of 20,000 inhabitants had been established due in large part to streams of southern blacks and Appalachian whites who migrated to Muncie in search of jobs.

Travelling from Ball State University to the Club, one passes Munsyana Homes, Muncie's oldest housing projects, which were built in 1941. Munsyana Homes are two-story, drab lime-green and beige, rectangular cinder-block buildings that occupy several city blocks. Despite the outward appearance of order and containment, the Homes are the scene of heavy drug trafficking and related crime. Nearby is a liquor store whose owner once won the city's "Outstanding Business of the Year" award. Abandoned convenience stores, a thriving blood plasma center, small businesses, storefront churches, and the abandoned relics of the glass factories all mix together in Industry.

The Muncie Boys and Girls Club is housed in a brick building built in 1951. The original windows were removed long ago to prevent theft and vandalism. There is no visible tagging (graffiti) anywhere on the Club facility, which is a sign that neighborhood gangs recognize it as neutral space. It has a large gymnasium, a recreation room filled with pool tables, an arts and crafts room, a small kitchen, a lounge with a television set and sofas, and an education room. From Tuesday through Saturday, it serves 170 inner-city children and youth ranging from five to seventeen years of age. Representative of the city's persistent residential segregation, most of the African American members of the Club reside in the black neighborhoods while poor whites live in Shedtown. University students who grew up in Muncie call Industry and the Southside "the low end." Although the majority of the Club's clients are African American, an increasing number identify themselves as "other" or biracial. The common denominator, however, is not race, but social class. The Club's members represent families of lower socioeconomic status who populate the city's working class. At the elementary school adjacent to the Club, the entire student body qualifies for the federal free or reduced lunch program.

Supported by the United Way and corporate and private donations, the Boys and Girls Club charges one dollar per month for membership, but "scholarships" are

readily available for children who cannot afford it. The purpose of the membership fee is to encourage commitment. Club staff members are all too aware that children join gangs for just that reason—a sense of belonging. During its busiest period, after school until 6 o'clock, the Club can be a chaotic place, as evidenced by one student's first impression:

Amy*: *In a way the Club looked worse than I had imagined. Children were screaming and shouting for no reason. I tried talking to the kids and asking them their names and what they did there. Two of the four kids I talked to just blew me off. The other two kind of talked to me, but in a very loud, obnoxious manner to the point where I couldn't understand them very well. I was stunned by the constant noise and opening and slamming of doors.* (*pseudonyms are used unless permission has been obtained)

The national Boys and Girls Club curriculum consists of the following program areas: athletics, education, gang and drug prevention, good citizenship, and survival skills (e.g., cooking). Local chapters are allowed to customize the curriculum to fit their needs. The Boys and Girls Club is an excellent example of non-formal education (NFE), defined (after Philip Coombs) as "any organized, systematic educational activity outside the framework of the formal [school] system designed to provide selective types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children" (Paulston and LeRoy, 1982, 336-7). NFE is closely associated with literacy programs in countries such as Nicaragua (Arnove, 1986), Brazil, and Guinea-Bissau (Freire, 1978) as well as with the field of adult education. Planned activities can last anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour. Recreation in the form of basketball, dodgeball, and other games is held out as a reward for completing homework. Although they do not typically hold teaching licensure, staff members function as a combination of teacher, social worker, and mentor.

University Teaching Majors

During a conversation, an African American resident of Muncie referred to the university as "out there." Puzzled, I said, "You speak of it as though it were another world." She responded emphatically, "It *is* another world!" Located a scant two miles northwest of the Club, the university is named for the aforementioned Ball Brothers who, in 1918, purchased a failing normal school and infused it with capital. Ball State University is now a comprehensive university with a student population of 18,500. Although teaching majors no longer dominate the university, they remain integral to its

institutional mission. The majority of education majors come from rural communities within a ninety-mile radius of the university. They are often first-generation college students who graduated from majority white, middle-class high schools. For many of them, the sheer size of the university is an eye-opening experience.

Education majors who are preparing to teach junior high, middle school, and high school subjects are required to take one course in multicultural education. Informal profiles constructed by the students at the beginning of the course reveal that they identify themselves as middle class, Christian, and small town (sometimes rural). Consistent with their belief that whiteness is normative, they do not identify themselves racially. African American and Asian students always do so. Their musical preferences are country and Christian contemporary. A few white and black students also listen to rap music and gospel. When asked what they would change about public education if they had the power, they initially have no suggestions. It has, after all, worked for them—they are part of the thirty percent of high school students who attend postsecondary institutions.

Critical Multicultural Education

The conceptual framework of critical theory is derived from the works of Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and others. Brazilian educator Paolo Freire contributed the concept of *conscientization,* or "the process in which [people] achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (Freire, 1985, footnote 2, p. 93). In order to achieve that reality, one must first locate—or perceive clearly (objectively)—his/her place (role) in that reality. In the process of interrogating one's sociopolitical reality, one becomes progressively more critical of it. One also begins to recognize his/her role as a change agent. According to Freire, then, this agency allows people not only to critically *name* the world, but also to *change* it (Freire, 1982). Critical theorists believe that we inhabit "a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege" (McLaren, 1994, 175). This world is both constructed and acted upon by its inhabitants, who are bound by class, race, and gender interests. It follows that the world they create is then necessarily racist, classist, and gendered.

The critical educator employs a dialectical approach. That is, he/she recognizes that the problems of society are part of the interconnectedness between society and the individual. In other words, the critical educator blames neither the "victim" nor the system, but sees clearly his/her role as creator, actor, and one who is acted upon within the larger society. The critical educator searches for the larger social, economic,

and political implications of seemingly isolated phenomena (McLaren, 1994). For example, the public school curriculum ostensibly prepares students for meaningful work, citizenship, and socialization. But in a larger sense it also plays a powerful role in social reproduction, or the perpetuation of the class system. One of the most insidious forms of social reproduction—and a frequent target of critical theorists—is tracking. Beginning in elementary school, students are "sorted" on the basis of test scores. By the time they reach high school, they have been tracked into a constellation of vocational education, tech prep, or college preparatory courses. Although this is done in the name of efficiency, critical theorists would argue that it acts to maintain a working class and to produce a relatively small leadership class.

Building upon critical theory, Peter McLaren has defined critical multiculturalism as a perspective from which "representations of race, class and gender are understood as the result of large social struggles over signs and meanings" (McLaren, 2000, 221). "Power signs" are words that evoke strong images such as "black," "poor," "welfare mothers," and "homeless." People who fall into these categories are viewed monolithically. They also serve as reference points upon which social and school policies are predicated. Persons so signified are objectified and marginalized by the dominant society. An example of this marginalization is the persistent racializing of standardized test scores in an attempt to link ethnicity to intelligence (for example, Herrnstein and Murray, 1994).

According to McLaren, the application of critical theory to multiculturalism invokes this central question: "How do we develop an understanding of difference that avoids an essentializing of Otherness?" (McLaren, 1994, 286). Multicultural education courses often denigrate "the Other" as someone who needs to be acted upon—to be assimilated into the dominant society. This is apt to occur in multicultural education courses with a service-learning component where critical theory is not well integrated into the field placement and reinforced dialogically. In her research on service-learning, Marilynne Boyle-Baise identified three paradigms: charity, civic education, and community building, each with its own goals and outcomes (Boyle-Baise, 2002). It is not surprising that research reveals that pre-service teachers are most likely to belong to the first category. After all, they often cite the desire "to make a difference" as one of their reasons for choosing education as a profession. In its most benign form, the charity impulse translates into good deeds. At its worst, it perpetuates whiteness, middle-class status and Christianity as normative. Rather than making a difference, critical theory requires students to think differently about their world.

Critical Pedagogy

The first task of developing a critical multicultural perspective is to see oneself more objectively by "unpacking" power, privilege, and racial identity. Community engagement can be a powerful pedagogical force in that process. But in order to develop a critical consciousness, critical theory must be inextricably integrated within the community agency field experience. Course materials and class discussions must reinforce and explicate the phenomena encountered in the field. In order for students to deconstruct their world, faculty must make conscious pedagogical choices.

I chose the following books as texts: Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, Alex Kotlowitz' *There are no Children Here*, and Gregory H. Williams' *Life on the Color Line*. The sophomores in my class still use high school, rather than the university, as a reference point. Kozol's portraits of under-resourced schools and the powerful imagery of sewage flowing into classrooms and football fields without goalposts is in jarring contrast to the schools attended by my students. Students often mistake the wealthy schools described by Kozol as private, rather than public, schools.

Kotlowitz' book is a documentary of two boys (Pharaoh and Lafeyette) growing up in the Henry Horner housing projects in Chicago. Although it is less than four hours away from Muncie, most of my students have never been to Chicago. This book introduces them to the world of the urban poor. Pharaoh, in particular, is a sympathetic character whose sweetness stands in stark contrast to his life in the projects. But along with chronicling drive-by shootings and the death of Lafeyette's best friend, the book celebrates the resilience of the boys (who belong to the Boys Club[1]) and their mother, LaJoe.

In his memoir of growing up as an impoverished light-skinned black in Muncie during the 1950s, Williams exposes the city's racial divisiveness. Williams' father, who passed for white, was a successful businessman in Virginia until his self-destructive behavior left him penniless. He moved Greg and his brother Mike to Muncie where they lived with their black grandmother. Williams attended the elementary school next to the Club and played basketball at the Club. A story of poverty as much as racism, it underscores the persistence of residential and economic segregation in Muncie. The books are supplemented by other relevant print materials and videos about race, class, oppression, and power.

According to Freire, the elements of critical pedagogy include dialogue, problem posing, and generative themes. Dialogical communication allows for liberation by providing "individual and collective possibilities for reflection and action" (McLaren, 1994, 307). It calls for a balance to be struck between the more or less empowered

parties. By communicating in an authentic way—*truly* relating—students are able to participate in the decisions made in the class. Dialogical communication can produce honest, authentic debate among students over issues such as bilingual education, affirmative action, and welfare policies. Beyond the classroom, a key element of dialogue is accomplished through reflective journals. Each week, students reflect on a topic related to the required readings. The Club allows for the application of theory to practice. By submitting the journals via e-mail, the classroom dialogue can be extended and problems posed.

Problem-posing education provides the opportunity for students and teachers to investigate universal or (after Freire) "generative" themes. Power signs and representations prevent us from seeing clearly. By problemitizing the world, however, students are given a critical lens through which to view the world—a lens not blurred by class, race, or gender constructs. Community engagement creates the opportunity in which problemitizing can occur. For example:

Rachel: *They asked us to design a mural for the new Keystone Club room, so we thought we would have a go at it. We were supposed to come up with something that would represent teenaged kids, and that would give the room some life. After an hour of brainstorming we had come up with a good idea. We had planned to do squares of bright color on the wall with black silhouettes of kids doing different things such as playing games, watching TV, hanging out with friends, and so on. But when we told the director, she said, "But what if the kids think these are all black kids, and there is some kind of meaning behind this?" We had not thought of that at all, and truthfully I was a little embarrassed. So we made a few adjustments, with the help of one of the Keystone Kids, and the end result came out pretty cool.*

Like many non-profit agencies in 2002, the Club struggled financially. Both corporate and individual donations declined as a lingering result of the attack on the World Trade Towers and the economic recession (Lewis, 2002). In the wake of 9/11, people sent donations to New York City rather than to local agencies. Potentially more devastating, the economic recession accounted for shortfalls in donations for virtually all non-profit organizations from animal shelters to soup kitchens.

Rachel: *When we got to the Club, once again the money was not there for them to go out and buy the paints needed. Luckily, Ms. Hampton [education director] remembered that they had some paints they were going to use a few years ago to paint a rainbow on the wall of the art room. So we rummaged around and found those. Thankfully the paints were all in good enough shape that they were still usable.*

Now that I think about it, I realize how much money the organizations I was involved with my whole life had. I cannot remember a time that we did not get something because the money was not there. Anytime that I need something I just go out and buy it but after visiting the Boys and Girls Club last Saturday I realized that they do not have that option.

A prime, generative theme addressed by critical multicultural education is that of racial identity. In order to deconstruct race, a certain de-centering of one's identity must first occur. Several developmental theories of racial identity, which view race as a social and psychologically constructed process, have been advanced. Janet Helms (1990) defines racial identity as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3). Understanding the sociocultural construct of race is crucial to developing a critical perspective. As discussed earlier in this paper, white students rarely see themselves in terms of racial identity. While they are quick to point out that they are middle class, they do not identify themselves as white. Before moving to a nonracist identity, one must first experience dissonance about one's own racial identity:

Amy: *Last week a perfect display of who the "other" was occurred. Directly quoting what a child said as I walked into the Club, "Shit, you are the whitest person I ever seen, you about as white as this piece of wood." If you might have guessed the piece of wood was a very light beige/flesh color. I hesitated and didn't know how to respond so I didn't say much. The whole point of integrating this quote into my journal is because I strongly believe it defines me as being the "other" at the Club.*

Liz: *The Club definitely influenced my view on being Hispanic. For a long time I was embarrassed by it, and later on I didn't even think about being Hispanic either way because I was with white people all of the time. The kids at the club helped remind me that I do look different, and they helped me see how beneficial my appearance and being a minority will be.*

In Peggy McIntosh' brief but classic article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," she lists unearned assets which can be found in a metaphorical knapsack of privilege. Examples range from the assurance that "I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" to "I can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' color and have them more or less match my skin" (McIntosh, 1989, 10-11). University students generally interpret the word "privilege" as the property of the upper class. By interrogating the meaning of privilege (that is, something that is taken for granted) students find examples of privilege writ small:

Destiny: *One thing that stuck in my head was when this little girl asked me what I had in my mouth. I said it was a retainer and she said, "Oh, did you ever have braces?" I told her yes and she said, "My dentist told me and my momma I needed braces but she say she can't afford them." That made me really think about how some of these kids are deprived of certain things.*

By deconstructing class privilege, students not only begin to see themselves more clearly, but can also recognize strengths and resilience in Club members such as Jerry.

By the age of eight, Jerry was already the primary caregiver for his younger sisters, while his mother worked. He often bullied some of the smaller Club members as well as my university students. But Jerry's complexity became evident over the course of the semester. When a new, white child showed up at the Club, Jerry became his protector. In return, the child's grateful parents asked Jerry to accompany them on a trip to Washington, D.C., the following summer. While on the trip, the Club's loudspeaker squawked out the message that Jerry had called to "tell everyone hello."

Spending time with Jerry allowed my students to recognize his belligerence as a form of resistance to victimization (Allport, 1954). During a tutoring session, he threatened to "knock those glasses right off your face" if my student wouldn't provide him with the correct answers. The student noticed that Jerry had tears in his eyes as they continued to work on his composition. Other students also began to "see" him more clearly:

Richard: *It was quite a surprise to get to the Boys and Girls Club and find that their Fall Festival was scheduled that day. Enter Jerry. He's black and I think he's in junior high. Jerry asked me if the kids were playing, and I said they didn't have tickets. He proceeded to cover for those kids. He had a dozen or so tickets, and he used them by paying for other kids to play musical chairs.*

Jerry was my interesting event at the Festival. I didn't get the opportunity to talk with him much, but I can see something in him. I see a person who's being like a big brother to some of the kids. I see someone willing to do things for others. I see someone who may very well turn out to be a community-oriented person, serving his home (wherever that may be in the future).

Under Construction: Pedagogy to Praxis

The process of conscientization is not developmental; that is, one does not take orderly, discrete steps from problem posing or dialogue to praxis. Rather, it is a holistic process in which all elements are interconnected and occur as integrated parts of the

whole. Critical pedagogy through community engagement can effectively foster dialogue and problem solving but praxis is more difficult to achieve.

Freire defines praxis as being "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1982, 36). The goal of praxis is liberatory—the achievement of a more just and equitable world for all inhabitants. One of its prerequisites is the evidence of humanization of the Other through the formation of authentic relationships. In a university multicultural education course bound by time constraints and frequency of student contact, it is difficult to achieve the kind of cognitive dissonance that produces praxis. Nevertheless, like privilege, praxis writ small does occur through the establishment of authentic relationships:

> Mike: *I am starting to get more comfortable because I have been getting to know the kids better, and vice-versa. I have learned that just helping a kid do math problems or look up words can be rather cold and impersonal. It is still satisfying to help them do these things, but sometimes it seems like a one-way experience. When it's over, the satisfaction seems to fade quickly unless I have made a personal connection with the kid. In the future, I am going to try to think of each interaction with kids (or anyone else for that matter) as a shared experience and consciously look for ways to develop relationships.*

To "consciously look for ways" signals the intention that Freire says is necessary for action. In Mike's case, the passive act of tutoring a student by using drill sheets and vocabulary practice is in itself not satisfactory. By creating an authentic relationship, both parties can learn something from each other and precipitate action:

> Jason: *My most enduring image of the Boys/Girls Club was witnessing, through the different ages of the children, a cruel assembly line of poverty, oppression, and ignorance turning innocent, happy, and hopeful children into delinquent, angry, and hopeless children. I remember a young little boy, innocently and comfortably grabbing my hand, holding it with a smile, as he led me to find him a basketball. As well, I remember a boy, only a few years older than the former one, who angrily threw a basketball down and walked off court cursing over something so trivial he probably forgot it by the end of the day. If I had the power, I would end the process of tracking students in schools.*

In summary, I advance the following definition of critical multicultural consciousness through engagement:

Critical multicultural consciousness through community engagement is predicated on the formation of a mutually beneficial partnership between educational entities (formal or non-formal) for the purpose of conscientization. The process is guided by

critical pedagogy (including dialogue, problem-posing, and generative themes) and the hopeful possibility of praxis (social action).

Within these wide boundaries, critical multicultural consciousness affords pre-service teachers the opportunity to interrogate and deconstruct their world view. As a process, critical multicultural consciousness is neither paradigmatic nor developmental. It does, however, require a certain redefinition of authority, a coherent integration between theory and practice so that each informs the other, a commitment to the formation of authentic relationships, and recognition of transformation writ small.

Conclusion: Beyond the Scholarship of Engagement

With the publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest L. Boyer challenged the traditional role of faculty as being removed from their communities. He recommended a reconnection between scholarship and community that would ultimately provide service for the common good. In the calls for service that emanated in reaction to the "Me Decade" of the 1980s (notably, Putnam, 1995), Boyer urged university faculty to reconnect with communities and engage through the scholarship of discovery, integration, application, integration, and teaching (Boyer, 1990).

According to Boyer's paradigm, the scholarship of discovery focuses on research or the production of knowledge. The scholarship of integration is an endorsement of generalization rather than specialization. The scholarship of application speaks directly to service; that is, using knowledge for the "common good." And the scholarship of teaching urges faculty to find creative ways to transmit knowledge to students. Boyer's paradigm of the scholarship of engagement, however, raises troubling questions about the role of faculty, the constituency of "community," and the meaning of "the common good" itself. University faculty provide solutions with little input from stakeholders. In fact, university faculty are positioned apart from both community agents and students.

When Boyer speaks of community, he refers to a community of scholars rather than endorsing an equitable, mutually beneficial partnership between community agencies and universities. When advocating a team approach to problem solving, he has in mind a team of scholars working together. This is no less true in regards to the scholarship of teaching, where faculty are urged to be creative and inspired, but retain their hierarchical role within the academy. But in order to support community engagement in a critical sense—and to approach critical consciousness—the authority role of faculty must be redefined. At the very least, the scholarship of teaching must become more facilitative than didactic.

Boyer envisions the scholarship of engagement as providing the solutions to environmental, educational, political, social, and "other" problems, defined as those that "require more carefully crafted study and, indeed, solutions that rely not only on new knowledge, but on integration, too" (Boyer, 1990, 77). But Boyer's idea of the common good is hegemonic. Social problems are not problemitized, and solutions are perceived as corrections to aberrations of the status quo. Essentially, Boyer sees the world as one that is acted upon by elites.

Collaborations between educational institutions and community agencies have become ubiquitous over the last decade. The literature related to community service-learning and multicultural education is steadily growing. Within that larger discourse, critical theory has much to offer theorists and practitioners. Grounded in critical theory, critical multicultural consciousness mandates no less, however, than a re-conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement. It challenges scholars to go beyond Boyer's emphasis on the intellect to include Freire's emphasis on the heart (humanism). The addition of a critical component to the scholarship of engagement will not only allow scholars, practitioners, and students to problemitize the field of community service learning itself, but—in the spirit of Freire—to change it.

Notes

1 The Boys Club became the Boys and Girls Club in 1990.

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