

Maximizing Impact, Minimizing Harm: Why Service-Learning Must More Fully Integrate Multicultural Education

Mark Langseth

Minnesota Campus Compact

As I argue here, relationships are fundamental to our work in both service-learning and multicultural education. And, of course, getting to know one another is fundamental to relationships. In this spirit, I want to begin with some brief comments about who I am, with particular attention to the perspective from which I approach the concepts and practices of service-learning and multicultural education. I write from a number of perspectives:

- I am a White, middle-class, heterosexual male.
- I am a husband and father who is deeply concerned about the formal education my daughters will receive, both at the K-12 and higher education level.
- I am someone who spent half his life in a small rural town and has since resided in the inner core of a large metropolitan area.
- I am someone who has been involved in service-learning and campus-community collaboration work at the local, state, and national level for more than 15 years.
- I am someone who has created and led a variety of programs that integrate service-learning with multicultural education, including very deliberately involving diverse groups of K-12 and college students in service-learning experiences and, with some docu-

mented success, helping break down cross-cultural barriers and misunderstandings in the process.

- I am someone who believes that the "isms"—racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and related -isms—lie at the fundamental core of many social, economic, and environmental problems in the United States and around the world—that there is simply nothing more central for us to address if we are serious about bringing about social change.
- I am someone who believes that experiential education must form the core, not the fringe, of our formal educational system.
- I am someone who believes that the field of service-learning has focused far too much on student impact and not nearly enough on community impact (although there are some promising signs that this is beginning to change).
- I am someone who is generally more knowledgeable about the field of service-learning than of multicultural education.

For the purposes of this chapter, I write explicitly from the service-learning side of this book and make an argument for why we, as campus service-learning leaders, must more fully integrate multicultural education into all of our work and why we must do it now. I also want to offer some suggestions for how we might go about this.

I have made a fundamental assumption that both service-learning leaders and multicultural educators are interested in transformative change—in students, in communities, and in institutions. Given this assumption about our collective interest in change, I work from three core premises:

1. Relationships, as I said earlier, are the fundamental building blocks for change;
2. Every service-learning program in the country operates within a complex multicultural environment; and
3. In such environments, relationships—and therefore change—cannot be achieved without significant knowledge, without respectful mind-, heart- and soul-"fullness," without strategic intentionality, and without courageous leadership.

RELATIONSHIPS AS BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CHANGE

At face value, this idea about relationships as fundamental to change may not appear exceedingly difficult to grasp. But, in fact, given the

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breadth and depth of its implications, this can be a very challenging idea both to understand and to put into action.

From my perspective, the most important relationships in any service-learning program are the ones between campus representatives and those in the community with whom they work. Although I also believe that student-to-student and student-to-faculty relationships are important, I am most concerned that we focus our attention first on community partnerships and relationships between campus and community representatives.

Far too often, campus-community partnership efforts, like so many other efforts at community change, do not adequately focus on relationships first. Rather, the focus is on finding the "right" programmatic "fix" and on doing this with some haste. We are, I believe, obsessed with finding the right program for the right problem, applying outdated or inappropriate models to community issues; the medical model of disease/diagnoses/drug; the military model of conflict/strategy/deployment, or the business model of problem/analysis/solution. We do this all the time in service-learning and we're not alone. Most social service agencies, government agencies, neighborhood organizations, and civic groups do the same thing. Unfortunately, we have all been enculturated to believe that if we just deploy the right programmatic weapon or take the right programmatic pill, we can solve anything. We cannot.

A related myth of the medical/military/business models of creating change is that, when approaching an issue, we must begin with a dispassionate, third-party analysis of the disease, the problem, or the deficit. But as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) documented via extensive research on troubled communities throughout the United States, community challenges are most successfully addressed when we focus first on assets rather than on deficits, and specifically on the perspectives, gifts, and talents of ordinary people, not experts. Similarly, public relationships—at least healthy ones—are built primarily by focusing on and interacting around each others' assets, not deficits.

Over the past 5 years, I have studied a variety of highly successful approaches to community change, including Kretzmann and McKnight's "asset-based" approach, the Industrial Areas Foundation's building relationships/building citizen power approach (1990), the Highlander Education and Research Center's learning circle approach (see Horton, 1990) and many others. The one absolutely clear commonality in all of these approaches is that high-trust relationships and high-investment relationship building are the most important and most fundamental elements in creating lasting community change.

I hasten to add, however, that approaching the development of such relationships solely as a means to a programmatic end is counter-productive. That is, building high-trust, high-investment relationships—founded on understanding across differences—also requires us to approach each relationship as an end in itself. It is in this spirit that truly transformative relationships and truly transformative programs are forged.

Many service-learning programs have been developed without deep collaboration with the community. But, as more and more of us are discovering, these programs are very limited without the fundamental ingredient of high-investment, high-trust relationships. Designing a program without the building blocks of such relationships is like building a house without the foundation—looks fine, at least initially, from the outside, but will not stand the test of time.

In the context of service-learning partnerships, putting relationships and the assets of ordinary people first comes with a number of challenges:

1. It takes much more time and personal/emotional investment;
2. It is initially much more process oriented than task oriented, thus running the risk of seeming "unproductive, unscientific, subjective and/or touchy-feely";
3. It often "messes up" even the most well-conceived programs or plans;
4. It may mean that we need to seek different partners who share our beliefs about the importance of relationships and assets; and
5. It takes the college or university out of the "expert" role.

In high-trust, high-investment relationships, campus and community partners are cocreators, cocordinators, coowners, and coevaluators of their joint efforts. They work together in a variety of highly strategic ways to effect longer range change in their communities. Their relationships often have a very "personal" closeness to them and involve a spirit of commitment to each other's continuous growth and development. And they work together strategically to build relationships among numerous individuals to ensure that the partnership outlasts changes in leadership.

In contrast, "lower trust" and "lower investment" relationships are characterized by a significant degree of professional distance between individuals and agencies who do not feel a strong stake in each others' development, and they tend to be much less creative and less

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jointly strategic about making longer range community change. This is not to say that lower trust, lower investment relationships are entirely without merit. It may well be that a campus and community-based organization desire exactly this kind of relationship and that productive community work occurs. But clearly, if our intention is to effect longer range community change and to create opportunities for multicultural education for students, these opportunities will be more available and much richer in the context of high-trust, high-investment relationships.

It is also interesting to note that a meta-analysis of several "principles of best practice" lists for service-learning, completed by Mintz and Hesser (1996), resulted in three themes—reciprocity, collaboration, and diversity. All of these themes are deeply rooted in this concept of relationships as fundamental to our work in service-learning, and they reinforce the importance of integrating multicultural education into service-learning as well.

Finally, some thoughts on student relationships and student impact. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the greatest opportunities for positive student impact in general lie in the context of high-trust, high-investment campus-community partnerships. A growing body of research on service-learning at the K-12 and collegiate level also suggests that the presence of intentional, well-designed opportunities for reflection and education is the key factor in determining whether or not students exhibit academic, civic, and multicultural development via their service-learning experiences (Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Eyer & Giles, 1994; Search Institute, 1999; Waterman, 1997). Although the research is not quite as explicit in its assertion that relationships play a key role in the success of these reflection or education opportunities, it has been my experience that the quality of communication and relationships nurtured by faculty and program leaders in these educational sessions correlates directly with the richness of student learning and development. Certainly, multicultural educators have known for some time that the quality of communication and the degree of trust and connectedness that one creates among students are absolutely essential to effective practice in multicultural education.

COMPLEX, MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

More than once I have heard colleagues from rural communities in Minnesota comment that there is no "diversity" in their town and lament that this limits their ability to do multicultural education via

service-learning. What they usually mean is that there is not a tremendous amount of racial diversity in their community.

But, as more and more multicultural educators and service-learning leaders understand, there are many different kinds of diversity—along commonly recognized lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and sexual orientation, as well as the less-recognized diversity that exists within and between higher education cultures and grassroots community cultures. Certainly, all of these types of diversity can provide rich opportunities for multicultural education.

With such understanding in mind, it is clear that every service-learning program in the country operates within a complex, multicultural environment. We must recognize that, unfortunately, in such environments, we have a very real capacity to do harm. As Gugerty and Swezey (1996) pointed out, "although most institutions of higher education have the best intentions when they embark on service-learning programs, their lack of attention to power differentials and to ethnocentric values creates harm and distrust in many communities" (p. 95). Mulling (1995) articulated three myths related to campus-community collaboration that must be addressed to avoid doing harm:

- There exist superior and deficient cultures;
- There is a superior knowledge and experience in higher education as compared to their communities; and
- There is a hierarchy of wisdom, with faculty wiser than students and students wiser than the community.

Sadly, many of us in the field have borne witness to the negative effects these myths can have, both on student and community. Personally, I have read journals or heard students say such things as "what's wrong with these people?" or "just like I thought, they're a bunch of drunk old men who ought to get a job" and a variety of related generalizations that indicate their lack of understanding of people different from themselves and of related social issues. I shudder to think of the attitudes of superiority that some program leaders, faculty, and students bring to their community interactions. Clearly, these concerns point directly to the importance—the imperative—of service-learning leaders and participants possessing exceptionally strong multicultural knowledge, experience, and perspectives.

I must also hasten to note here that we ought not place the blame for such student attitudes at the feet of students only. In a culture

where the old tradition of "noblesse oblige" is alive and well and where discourse on community and political issues remains at a frighteningly thin level, it should be no surprise that many students' understanding of these and related issues is equally thin.

Beyond doing no harm, I believe that one of our most important responsibilities is to ensure that we harvest the positive possibilities for multicultural education available to us via service-learning. Service-learning provides an ideal environment for student development in this area, because it is experiential and because it is located in a specific and shared, but external context to campus. In my experience, many traditional efforts at multicultural education are limited because they are exclusively on-campus discussions, which, although productive in some cases, often flounder in a mire of personal feelings and world-as-it-is versus world-as-it-should-be confusion, without a specific context or adequate set of relevant, shared experiences from which to draw. Service-learning can be an extremely effective means of addressing these limitations in traditional multicultural education efforts.

One final point to emphasize the critical place of multicultural education in service-learning: As we all know from our personal and professional lives, relationships are difficult to manage in any context, but they are particularly difficult to form and maintain in multicultural contexts. As Wiger (1995) and others have pointed out, there are major obstacles to building campus-community relationships in addition to the myths previously cited. These include significant histories of individual or organizational dominance; current power dynamics that often perpetuate injustices and oppression; genuine cultural differences around definitions, values, or norms that can lead to misunderstanding and conflict; and a general climate of mistrust in intergroup relations. And just as campuses can view communities inaccurately, so can communities view campuses with undue cynicism. Communities might view colleges and universities as elitist, out-of-touch, White, or wealthy institutions that have little to offer them. There may be resentment of a "research subject" relationship between the university and the community or land, housing, admissions, employment, or parking conflicts, further complicating efforts to partner. Add to this the public's rising mistrust of institutions in general and the inherent problem of "service" language (implying a "have/have not" framework) and we have a very complicated context in which to operate and an equally strong case for integrating multicultural education more fully and effectively into our service-learning efforts.

NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE, RESPECT/"FULNESS," INTENTIONALITY, AND LEADERSHIP

In such complicated environments, it is critical that campus and community partners develop in all program leaders and participants the tools and perspectives of multiculturalism, including:

- Significant knowledge about the people we are working with, about the historical and current state of intergroup relations related to our context, about the larger social issues and power dynamics in which we are operating, and about our own personal and institutional biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.
- If we are working in a particular neighborhood, for example, we need to know the history of that neighborhood, particularly as it relates to oppression or injustices that are commonly understood by people in the neighborhood. We need to be familiar with the current concerns of neighborhood residents. We need to know how our particular partnership fits in the larger scheme of efforts at neighborhood improvement and what the history of campus-community relations has been. We need to know about the larger social, economic, and political context. And we need to have significant knowledge about our own personal biases (often requiring both hard work and skilled guidance) and about our institution's policies and priorities as they relate to working within a particular community.

- A sense of respect and fullness: Building on this base of knowledge, we must nurture in ourselves and others a deep sense of respect and the heart-, mind-, and soul-fullness necessary to operate effectively in complicated multicultural environments. Granted, such attitudes and states of being, along with their commensurate behaviors, do not develop overnight. Nor are they easy to teach—for example, helping students distinguish between "respect" and absolute moral relativism is a very complicated endeavor. But we must pursue this important work in much greater earnest if we are serious about minimizing harm and maximizing positive impact of service-learning and campus-community collaboration efforts.

- A commitment to strategic intentionality: That is, as we approach both our community impact and student impact goals via service-learning, we must be very intentional and highly strategic about the programmatic choices we make. Too often, although we say we have the best intentions in mind, our actions do not reflect much intentionality or strategic thinking at all. For example, have we cho-

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sen community partners based more on convenience (i.e., they have a user-friendly volunteer program) than on what kind of partnership both the residents of that community and we believe will reap the most long-term impact? If we do not approach our community partnerships with such strategic intentionality, we are open to criticism that we are more interested in using the community as a learning laboratory or as research subjects than we are in serving as an ally for change.

Similarly, on the student impact side, we are often much less intentional than we ought to be in regard to integrating multicultural education into our programs or courses. Far too often, our efforts are relatively thin attempts to address very general issues about "difference" and "diversity," absent deeper theoretical understandings of multiculturalism and with little accompanying knowledge and analysis of the specific historical and current local context in which we operate. Moreover, even our efforts at understanding difference and diversity in more depth can be limited by our own capacity to facilitate truly meaningful discussion and learning in these areas.

- Courageous leadership: Finally, I believe that we, as service-learning leaders, must be well prepared to exercise courageous leadership in our community partnerships and with our students, faculty, and administration. One of the most common criticisms I have heard from communities of color and from low-income communities about campus partnerships—and partnerships with institutions in general—is that when the going gets tough and allies are needed to advocate for change in, for example, city policy or funding priorities, the campus is not there for them and therefore is not really serious about helping them.

That is not to say that a college or university should always stand with a particular community on a public issue. What it does suggest is that, with thoughtful, courageous leadership, we ought to be willing to explore creative ways to manage, not shy away from, potential political consequences and to welcome, not avoid, conflicts as "teachable moments." Regardless, we should be clear with our community partners up front about how we will approach such issues as they arise and what options might be available. For example, although the institution itself may not be willing put its weight behind a particular issue, perhaps a group of faculty or students might do so or might help mobilize others on campus or in the community to do so. Anticipating these situations can help tremendously in creating the kind of lasting relationship with a community that maximizes the opportunity for positive community and student impact.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

My organization, Minnesota Campus Compact, has begun research on campus service-learning programs that are committed to more effectively integrating multicultural education. From this initial research and from my experience consulting with campuses over the past 12 years, I would suggest several courses of action for readers interested in more fully and more effectively integrating multicultural education into your service-learning efforts. Please note that the "cross-cutting theme" for all of these areas is a commitment to building better and better relationships:

Make Multicultural Education a High Priority. I hope I have made a compelling case in this chapter that, for service-learning leaders, there is simply no way to reach our most desired outcomes for communities or students without a very strong commitment to multicultural education. Multicultural education is not just another aspect of our programming. In my opinion, it is the most important aspect to our programming, given that "-isms" and cross-cultural relations lie at the core of so many of our social, economic, and environmental challenges and at the very heart of our service-learning and campus-community collaboration efforts; and given the high potential to do harm if we do not focus our attention in this area.

Multicultural education is also one of the few issue areas that is relevant across all of our service-learning program activities, from recruitment of participants to community partnerships to reflective/education components. As a result, multicultural education can be a wonderful issue around which individual and collective campus efforts can coalesce, giving them a greater sense of coherence and purpose.

Relatedly, although most campuses have made multicultural education a priority, very few are satisfied with their efforts to integrate multicultural education into their overall educational experiences. Adopting an increased focus on multicultural education in service-learning, then, also affords us another avenue to demonstrate our direct relevance to larger campus priorities.

Finally, I want to suggest that a participatory process for making decisions about how to further integrate multicultural education can itself serve as a relationship-building tool—bringing leaders in service-learning together with others on campus and with community partners. Often, issues related to multiculturalism and diversity are foremost on the minds of grassroots community leaders and, for example, multicultural affairs offices on campus. Seeking input from a

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specific community partner or from your multicultural affairs office on how you might go about integrating multicultural education more effectively into your efforts can both help you improve your efforts and strengthen relationships with these groups.

Commit to Ongoing Personal and Professional Development. Given the enormous complexity of issues related to multiculturalism, no one, no matter how experienced, knowledgeable, and wise, is exempt from the need for continuous development in this area. For most of us, such development must be both internal (e.g., consistently uncovering our own backgrounds and biases, pains and passions) and external (e.g., educating ourselves about historical, theoretical, factual, and other perspectives on multiculturalism and change). In order to lead effective efforts at multicultural education, we must invest in ourselves. I simply cannot overemphasize this point.

Analyze and Revise Your Community Partnerships. As I argued earlier, multicultural education efforts are more effective when implemented in the context of high-trust, high-investment relationships with community partners. If a campus wishes to step up its multicultural education efforts within its service-learning initiatives, then it is advisable to review current community partnerships to determine what steps need to be taken toward this end. This may result in deepening relationships with existing partners or in creating altogether new partnerships.

The other key point here is that we will likely need to rely on our community partners to assist us in our efforts at more effectively integrating multicultural education. Although many community partners already help orient students for their role in their organizations, assisting with multicultural education efforts can require much more investment. If our relationships with them are relatively thin, the likelihood of their participation is diminished.

Analyze and Revise the Learning Component(s) of Your Efforts. Although many service-learning programs include some form of "diversity training" or "appreciation of differences" sessions, many of these efforts are weak in substance and brief in duration. Given the highly complex nature of multicultural education and the need to address a wide range of both personal development and broader social issues, much more rigor in these efforts is needed. We must make multicultural education a major priority of our reflection/education efforts if we hope to make a difference in the lives of our students. Combating -isms and developing strong multicultural attitudes, per-

spectives, and skills requires highly thoughtful, highly strategic efforts over significant periods of time.

This brings up a related point: Given the complexity of multicultural issues and the need for development and learning over time, it is important that we consider ways in which multicultural education can be woven into as many service-learning venues as possible. Curricular programs, service-learning courses and internships, community-based work-study programs, action research efforts, and other efforts should all include a strong emphasis on multicultural education. Similarly, multicultural education at its best would be woven into every aspect of each of these programs, from orientation and training to recruitment and celebration. Only then will most of our participating students be given the opportunity to explore multicultural issues in adequate depth over a significant period of time.

Connect With Larger Campus Agendas vis-à-vis Multicultural Education. As I said earlier, most colleges and universities have identified diversity or multicultural education as a significant priority in their overall strategic plan. It is important that we are familiar with past and current attempts at addressing these priorities at an institutional level. Do they focus mostly on recruiting and retention of students or faculty of color? Do they focus on creating a climate of respect and dignity on campus across a wide range of differences? Is there a concentrated effort to address some of these issues in, for example, an office of multicultural affairs? Are these the only efforts being pursued on campus? Who else is concerned about these issues?

To my knowledge, there are very few examples of collaboration between service-learning programs and multicultural affairs offices around multicultural education. This might be where service-learning leaders look first to collaborate and there may very well be possibilities for such collaboration. But often, as in any potential collaborative effort, barriers to collaboration are significant, ranging from little time for partnerships to lack of trust or competition between offices. Although I would strongly recommend exploring collaboration with your multicultural affairs office or its equivalent on campus, I would not advise staking your whole effort on this exploration. Regardless, however, you should keep that office informed of your intentions to more fully and effectively integrate multicultural education into your service-learning efforts and not let petty or competitive tensions interfere with the potential for further collaboration.

On a broader scale, I would strongly urge that you gain support from key institutional leaders for your particular effort, and position

your efforts in such a way that they are seen (as much as possible) as complementary to, not competitive with, other institutional initiatives aimed at multicultural education.

Integrate Knowledge, Respect, Intentionality, and Leadership Throughout. See the previous paragraphs for further discussion of each of these areas. The key point to keep in mind is that multicultural education efforts in the context of service-learning ought to combine both personal development and theoretical and factual educational opportunities.

Choose (Wisely) Others to Help You. The pool of campus and community consultants, presenters and facilitators who might assist us in our own personal/professional development or in designing or implementing more effective multicultural education components in our programs has expanded significantly. As in any other field, the quality of help provided by these people varies significantly. At the same time, there are very few service-learning leaders who have the capacity to completely self-direct their personal/professional development or to design and implement multicultural education efforts without significant assistance. One of your key tasks, then, as a service-learning leader is to choose wisely people who can assist you in these efforts.

People I have found most helpful toward this end are visionary and hopeful, but understand the world as it is; believe in the importance of both deep internal work and the need for theoretical and factual information; are highly skilled at group process and can both support and challenge people; are highly knowledgeable about -isms and their impact on larger social challenges; and truly understand the specific context in which they are working. Experience working with students and in community change endeavors is also helpful.

Certainly, you will have other criteria by which you choose people to assist you in your efforts. Whatever they are, be very clear about them and be highly deliberate in your choices. It's worth the time to find the right partners.

Be Prepared to Receive Feedback. Because issues related to multicultural education are both highly complex and critically important to so many people, opinions about effective practice are often strong. I fully expect that I will receive feedback, both positive and negative, on this chapter. In order to keep growing and learning in this richly complicated area, I must be prepared to receive this feedback, particularly any negative feedback I may not wish to hear. Like-

wise, as you move forward with your efforts to integrate multicultural education, you will receive feedback, some of it negative. Rather than retreating from this feedback, I suggest you "lean into it," inquire further from those who criticize, put this feedback into your continuous reflection and revision loop and adjust as you see fit. The point is that you should expect feedback and be prepared to receive it, no matter what its content or tone.

As we implement strategies for "making it happen," we must also remember that weaving through all of these efforts is the challenge of creating high-trust, high investment relationships with all of our campus and community stakeholders. How exactly we accomplish this is highly dependent on our personal style and our particular campus and community contexts, but at every opportunity, we must pursue the development of such relationships.

A FINAL CHALLENGE

How can the service-learning movement influence itself to move beyond surface level needs and symptoms to contribute to problem solving and resolution of deeper institutional and systemic root causes? (Massengale, 1998, p. 11).

Service-learning in higher education is at a crossroads. For several years now, we have been building a critical mass of people interested in and committed to this innovative educational and community development strategy. The question now before us is: Are we really accomplishing what we say we wish to accomplish, in the community, with students, within our institutions? Clearly, issues related to the quality and impact of our efforts must now take center stage if the movement is to continue with the same momentum built so carefully by so many for so long.

Toward this end, I believe there are three highly interrelated investments we must make and must make now:

1. a renewed focus on longer-term community impact and deeper community relationships. Perhaps the most fundamental issue here is learning to cross cultural boundaries and to build cross-cultural bridges—strong, lasting bridges that stand the test of time and result in sustainable change.
2. highly strategic efforts to increase faculty/institutional investment in service-learning. Such support is absolutely critical to sustain our efforts and build more infrastructure, so we can pursue

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deeper, more lasting change in communities and in students. Although this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter, this is a critical piece of our work over the next several years. We simply cannot both operate on a shoestring and deliver the kind of community partnerships and student reflective/education components needed to really make a difference.

3. weaving multicultural education more fully and effectively into everything we do.

Significant state and national efforts are beginning to mount on the first two strategies. But building a collective momentum to weave multicultural education more fully and effectively into our philosophy and practice in service-learning remains undone. For the good of our communities, our students, our institutions, and the service-learning movement, let us begin now with this critical work.

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Strengthening Multicultural Education With Community-Based Service Learning

Christine E. Sleeter
California State University Monterey Bay

The following examples of poor attempts at multicultural teaching may be familiar to multicultural teacher educators.

- A second-grade teacher laments the lack of interest parents of her students seem to have in education. "They just won't help out at home," she says, "They have this belief that education is only the school's job and that they don't have to help out. They don't come in for conferences, they don't read to their kids at home—they just don't seem to care!"
- The principal of an elementary school is struggling with community desires that the school's curriculum be more multicultural. He decides to respond by organizing a cultural fair in conjunction with Cinco de Mayo. He is puzzled when an African-American teacher comments that having a fair might be fun, but doing so is pretty irrelevant.
- A White preservice teacher grumbles that course work in multicultural education is a waste of time. Her mother is a teacher, and has told her that teachers don't need that kind of course work. One of her assignments is to develop a set of multicultural lesson plans. She wants to pass the course, so she turns in lesson plans she developed for a science methods course, sprinkling the word "culture" here and

**Integrating Service Learning
and Multicultural Education
in Colleges and Universities**



Edited by

Carolyn R. O'Grady
Gustavus Adolphus College



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