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## Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Whiteness

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In this article we employ whiteness as a conceptual framework to contextualize how faculty develop and implement, and consequently how students experience, service learning. A vignette that illustrates the pervasiveness of whiteness in service learning is followed by an analysis that details how whiteness frames the teaching and learning in this service learning experience. Through this example and analysis, we seek to increase instructors' capacity and confidence to interrupt the patterns and privileges of whiteness that too often are normalized in service learning.

Service learning, a pedagogical strategy that employs community service and reflection on service to support students in meeting academic learning goals and developing greater community and social responsibility, has found a secure niche in U.S. higher education. Campus Compact (2010), a coalition of universities committed to the civic mission of higher education, reports that 7% of faculty at over 1,100 member institutions of higher education offer a course with service learning, a statistic that has held steady over the last several years. Faculty incorporate service learning because they want to bridge theory and practice, encourage active learning, and provide opportunities for students to develop skills in leadership, communication, cultural understanding, and critical thinking.

At the same time, service learning is being implemented mostly by white faculty with mostly white students at predominantly white institutions to serve mostly poor individuals and mostly people of color (Green, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. As service learning courses most often enroll white, middle-class, traditional age, college students who are not also juggling jobs, debt, and family responsibilities, Butin (2006) notes that "there is a distinct possibility that service-learning may ultimately come to be viewed as the 'Whitest of the White' enclave of postsecondary education. . . . a luxury available only to the privileged few" (p. 482).

This possibility becomes more likely given the demographics of college attendance, which are shifting in the opposite direction. Nationally, undergraduate enrollment increased among African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders between 1990 and 2008, with Hispanic enrollment more than doubling. The percentage of African American undergraduates rose from

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9.6% in 1990 to 13.9% in 2008. Hispanic students' representation rose from 6.1% to 12.9% during the same period. Asian/Pacific Islander rose from 4.2% to 6.8% in 2008, while the percentages of American Indians/Alaska Natives and Nonresident aliens stayed consistent at about 1% and 2%, respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

The changing demographics of student enrollment should impel educators to examine how we implement service learning, paying attention to our biases, expectations, and traditions. Without such examination, service learning can become part of what we call a pedagogy of whiteness—strategies of instruction that consciously or unconsciously reinforce norms and privileges developed by, and for the benefit of, white people in the United States. These norms and privileges are based on color-blind and ahistorical understandings of social problems in society where race is indeed a crucial factor. Service learning projects based on a pedagogy of whiteness have minimal impact on the community and result in mis-educative experiences for students, such as unchallenged racism for White students and isolating experiences for students of color, and missed opportunities for educators to make their own instruction more transformative.

In this article, we describe whiteness as a social construction that remains invisible to white people but conveys to them normative privileges based on such color-blindness. We present a case of service learning, illustrating the pervasiveness of whiteness in service learning, and use our understanding of whiteness to analyze it and offer alternatives for service learning practice that are not rooted in white supremacy<sup>2</sup> but instead allow for making white supremacy visible and critiquing it.

### WHITENESS AS PEDAGOGY

This article uses whiteness as a conceptual framework to contextualize how faculty develop and implement and consequently how students experience and learn from service learning. Leonardo (2002) offers a useful definition of whiteness as “a collection of everyday strategies [that are] characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions” (p. 32). Like Leonardo (2009), we see whiteness and the privileges attached to it not as “a rather passive description of racial domination without agents” (p. 9) but as part of a “process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color” (p. 75). Therefore, “a critical analysis of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the *state* of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (p. 9). We believe service learning too often plays a role in this process of domination and also believe that it can play a role in a more critical pedagogy that examines white supremacy. The rest of this section explores three themes of whiteness—the historical construction of whiteness, invisibility and normative privileges of whiteness, and color-blind approaches to race—and their connections to service learning pedagogy.

#### Construction of Whiteness

Whiteness, like race, is a human construct not a biological reality. Mukhopadhyay and Henze (2003) explain that race may not be “real” in a biological sense, but it surely is “real” socially,

politically, economically, and psychologically. The social construction of race, and of whiteness, permeates people's lived experience in real and tangible ways. Lewis (2003) explains:

Racial categories are not merely sociological abstractions but are potent social categories around which people organize their identities and behavior and that influence people's opportunities and outcomes. . . . They result in objective, measurable differences in the life circumstances of different racial groups. (p. 6)

Whiteness privileges the cultural understandings, mores, and values of European immigrants to the United States who became "white" by assimilating to a common racial identity (Ignatiev, 1995) that involved inclusion as well as exclusion, which often played out along racial lines (Campbell & Oakes, 1997). Toward the close of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, different ethnic groups who shared a white skin tone began to emphasize their shared ways of thinking about and acting in the world to access the collective power and economic benefits of whiteness. Eastern Europeans, Italians, and Irish immigrants engaged in conscious and deliberate actions to blur the lines regarding race, language, culture, religion, and nationality to enter the white racial category (Brodkin, 1994; Horsman, 1997; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 2005).

Favorable economic and governmental policies for Whites and discriminatory practices against people of color gave further incentives for marginal ethnic groups to embrace a white identity and created a reinforcing cycle of systemic advantage: Whiteness influenced access to the middle-class, and upward class mobility eased the transition to whiteness (Brodkin, 1994). The post-World War II era provided many opportunities for white assimilation, particularly in the suburbs and on college campuses. Governmental practices that granted Whites' access to home loans in the suburbs created white enclaves denied to people of color (Mahoney, 1997). The GI Bill increased the number of white, male, first-generation students on college campuses (Katznelson, 2005), providing opportunities for economic prosperity, access to upwardly mobile social contacts, and an understanding of the values and behaviors that were prized in whiteness.

White privilege is a replicating force in that it produces ways of being and thinking that reinforce the privileges available to Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Tatum, 2008). It influences the continued social construction of race and of reality, what Campbell and Oakes (1997) call "the complex processes that produce the 'common-sense' categories of everyday life" (p. 146). It forms "the dominant narrative, the group of received understandings and basic principles that form the baseline from which we reason" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. 177). Understanding the dominant narrative—learning and replicating the "common sense" cultural paradigms of the dominant narrative at appropriate times and in appropriate ways— influences success.

Service learning, lacking a critical focus on race, can reinforce these socially constructed understandings of whiteness. The language of service learning, "underprivileged" and "at risk" for example, can reinforce stereotypes based in white supremacy (Boyle-Baise, 1998). Similarly, defining white, middle-class students as automatically and necessarily capable of serving reinforces white supremacy. The framing of social problems in service learning classrooms can also reinforce unreflective beliefs based in whiteness. When problems are framed as the result of individual circumstances (e.g., drug addiction, dropping out of school) rather than political and social processes (e.g., immigration policy or residential segregation), students are denied opportunities to learn that racial domination is not the result of past "mistakes" from which some passively benefit but, instead, is the result of intentional processes that are ongoing. Finally, students in

service learning classes rarely have opportunities to learn about their own or other's racial identity development, even though many of the affective responses to service learning, from guilt to anger, are rooted in various stages of such development. Accounting for the social construction of phenomena from race to homelessness and illiteracy, for example, enhances the learning of all students.

### Invisibility and Normative Privileges of Whiteness

Whiteness informs many aspects of college campuses, including decisions regarding what constitutes canonical literature (Morrison, 1993), embodied in literature on service learning (Butin, 2010); constituting what forms of language are considered "academic" (Smitherman, 1985) and which methods of inquiry and ways of knowing are privileged (Milner, 2007; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Euro-centric and race-based understandings of the world are the foundation for institutional and cultural systems of power, which allocate resources along lines of race and other aspects of human identity.

African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois (1935/1995, p. 700) described the "public and psychological wage" of whiteness that unified working-class men in the nineteenth century. More recently, McIntosh (1988) used the term "white privilege" as a way to capture the material and psychological benefits of whiteness. Wise (2000) describes this privilege as "psychological money in the bank" (para. 7) that Whites have as a resource when negotiating with societal and governmental institutions.

In institutions that define and are defined by whiteness, merit results from one's ability to understand and navigate intricate cultural systems rather than an intrinsic ability or aptitude. Individual effort is exalted by Whites because all the systemic advantages they enjoy are invisible or discounted as part of a common sense cultural paradigm (Wildman & Davis, 1995). The structural and normative privileges of whiteness are rarely seen by Whites because they frame privilege as a series of independent outcomes rather than the result of deliberate decisions made by governments, institutions, and groups of people. Taken together, these decisions demonstrate the "remarkable power of racism to sustain itself" (Cleaver, 1997, p. 161) as a force of privilege for some and discrimination for others, invisible to most of those who benefit the most.

A corollary of white privilege is minimizing racism. While many Whites accept that the blatantly discriminatory practices of legal segregation and Jim Crow were racist and harmed people of color, they rarely acknowledge the many ways that Whites continue to receive advantages. Racism is collectively defined as the aberrant, violent behavior of the few, not the subtle benefits enjoyed by Whites, and as something that was a problem in the past but rarely an issue today.

The invisibility and normative privileges of whiteness shape service learning and are reinforced by service learning, particularly when so many practitioners in the field assume "an 'ideal type' of service-learning student: one who volunteers her time, has high cultural capital, and gains from contact with the 'other'" (Butin, 2006, p. 481) and is also assumed to be white. Service learning privileges students and faculty who decide what the problem is, who or what needs fixing, and what the appropriate fix is. Frequently, students are placed in service contexts that they deem "safe," but are more accurately "comfortable" and, therefore, less challenging and have less potential for making visible privileges of whiteness (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). Settings focused on charitable service can potentially lead to students accepting that certain injustices

are inevitable rather than the result of ongoing discriminatory processes (Vaccaro, 2009). Worse yet, the missionary approach of some students to service learning can lead them to think that the goal of service is to make “them” more like “us.” Finally, focusing reflection on the recipients of service rather than on the lives of those serving also diminishes opportunities to consider the benefits of whiteness that have accrued over generations.

### Color-blind Approach to Racial Differences

The invisibility of whiteness and the decreases in overt racism in the mid-twentieth century, such as outlawing legal segregation and granting voting rights, have produced a new color-blind racial ideology or what Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls “racism without racists” among Whites who avoid or deny the salience of race as evidenced in statements like, “I don’t see color,” “We’re all Americans,” or “People are all the same.” Statements like these are the exclusive privilege of whiteness because they assume everyone is the same even when there are real differences in racial identities and experiences. Roediger (1994) writes that whiteness is not just oppressive and false, it is “nothing but oppressive and false” (p. 13). And Lewis (2003) found in her study of school settings, “Explicit color-blind discourse masked an underlying reality of racialized practice and color-conscious understanding” (p. 32).

Lewis (2003) asserts that “color consciousness remains pervasive and pernicious, just more covert than during Jim Crow” (p. 34). It may be even more pernicious than direct discrimination because color blindness removes one’s ability to question racialized experiences. White people ignore racial realities while embracing race neutrality, which is a discourse that maintains their humanity. They also silence dissent and privilege complicity in constructing and perpetuating racism. “Color-blind ideology . . . stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality in daily life through accusations such as ‘playing the race card’ or ‘engaging in identity politics’” (p. 34).

Color-blindness informs service learning and is promoted by it as well, particularly in the discourse of reflection on service. Language like “urban youth” and “inner city schools,” for example, serves as code for talking about race without naming it. Reflective discussion about service can quickly turn to issues of socioeconomic, which white students and faculty are more comfortable with than issues of race. Because identities are too often fractionalized, students may, for example, see service at a women’s shelter as only relevant to gender rather than also intersecting with race. Faculty are complicit in promoting color blindness. They may be timid about challenging racist assumptions by white students. They may not challenge students’ beliefs in a post-racial society, inaccurate information (e.g., claims that only people of color benefit from “affirmative action” while ignoring programs, like “legacy admissions” to college, which functions as a form of affirmative action for Whites), or clichéd understandings from service (e.g., “all people are alike at heart”) that, while containing some truth, hide real differences along racial lines.

### SERVICE LEARNING IN A SOCIOLOGY COURSE

The following vignette is a work of fiction, but it is based on our experiences and observations as well as the experiences and observations of students we interviewed for a previous study (Mitchell

& Donahue, 2009). We have used this case study in professional development with college and university faculty who often recognize some aspect of the vignette in their own practice or in the experiences of students with whom they work. While we do not know a single instructor who develops and implements service learning projects as described here, we do know instructors who have at least one belief or teaching strategy in common with the professor described in our vignette. In that sense, the vignette captures the assumptions and practices in the field of service learning, more than it realistically conveys all that any single faculty member does.

We believe the vignette illustrates the good intentions as well as the positive potential of service learning alongside the whiteness that pervades the pedagogy and marginalizes the experiences of students of color, while detracting from all students' opportunities to learn. Such service learning has the potential to be mis-educative because it does not promote students' reflection and potential for growth (Dewey, 1938/1997) and because it discounts the understanding and perspectives of persons of color (Woodson, 1933/1990).

Soc 152, Sociology of Education, is a popular course with undergraduates at State University, enrolling the maximum 50 sophomores, juniors, and seniors every Fall. The class includes a mix of departmental majors and students fulfilling the university's social science requirement. Both groups cite the course's service learning requirement as one of their reasons for signing up, and year after year, the course receives generally high ratings in end of semester reviews.

Dr. Sharon Daniels has been teaching the course for the last eight years and considers it one of her favorite classes to teach. The goals of the course are for students to connect education to a number of sociological phenomena, such as social mobility, stratification, social capital, and social reproduction. Two years ago, she introduced service learning as part of the course, hoping to focus more on the dynamics of race, class, and gender in schools. She found that the involvement with community organizations revitalized her interest in the course and provided students with real world experiences to accompany the textbook and articles in her course reader. Professor Daniels was attracted to service learning because it spoke to her concern that academic knowledge be used for social good. She also believes that service provides a rich opportunity for "border crossing" and remembers her own first experiences with service and, as a white person, having the feeling for the first time of being in situations where she was a minority.

On the first day of class, Daniels tells students about the service learning project and her goal of connecting experience to the sociological theory they will be studying in the course. She explains her rigorous service learning requirements. Students are expected to spend a minimum of four hours per week in service at a school, and this service must be outside work they might already do, such as serve on a parent-teacher organization or tutor a niece or godchild. When students present conflicts with jobs or families, she recommends another sociology course without service learning.

Students are free to serve at any school but Daniels explains that the campus service learning office has created a partnership with Wilson Middle School, a school with a mostly African American and Latino student body, just a few blocks from campus. About a dozen students choose to work in the Wilson tutoring program. With some of the lowest standardized test scores in the city, Wilson is always requesting tutors from the university. Daniels believes serving at Wilson will be good for her students because it will expose them to many of the problems and challenges of urban schools. Concerned about her students' safety, Daniels explains that, while Wilson is nearby, the neighborhood connecting school and university is not without crime. She warns students to be alert and ideally travel in pairs.

Daniels knows that reflection is key to learning from service and connecting service to course content so she assigns journal entries every week and structures reflective conversations into class every other week. Usually during the first conversation, several students tutoring at Wilson express their shock at how poorly students read and how discipline at the school is “out of control.” Daniels acknowledges that the school may be very different from their own middle school experiences. Several of Daniels’ white students discuss conversations they had with Wilson students and express their sadness at the home lives of some students, whether because the family is poor, a parent is missing, a sibling uses drugs, or a friend has experienced violence. Daniels noticed that most of the students of color in her class remained silent during the discussion, and she left the class thinking about what she could do to encourage their greater participation in the future.

Daniels saves the last reflection session of the class to focus on the intersection of race with the service learning project. When students bring up issues of race earlier in the semester, she acknowledges these issues and informs students that they will be looking at these in more detail toward the end of the semester. In part, she waits until the end of the semester to make sure that students know each other better, something she believes will contribute to the kind of safety needed to discuss a sensitive and possibly contentious issue. To prepare students for the session, Daniels assigned several articles, one on critical race theory and several on the intersection of race and education, looking in particular at causes and consequences of the “education gap” in K-12 schools.

She opened the discussion by asking students how they see race as a component of what they are learning in their service at schools. One white student, Erik, says that the problems at Wilson are not really about race. He has talked to several teachers and says, “It’s not like they’re racists. They really care about the kids there.” Another white student, Joanne, offers, “It’s really as much about poverty as about race” and adds, “I don’t think it’s surprising that there’s an achievement gap when most of the African American and Latino students at Wilson come from poor families.” Wanting to draw some of the students of color into the discussion, Daniels asks Tracey, an African American sophomore who has written some of the most thoughtful reflective journals, what she thinks about Joanne’s comments. Daniels notices that Tracey pauses before answering, as if she is considering several different responses, and then says, “I am only speaking for myself and my experience, but it’s never not about race in American schools.” The class becomes quiet and Alexis, choking back emotion, says,

This class is so powerful for me. I have been struggling with feeling helpless as a White person to make any kind of difference. I feel like this problem is so huge it’s not going to change soon, but at least I’m making a difference right now with one student that I’m tutoring in math. I feel like this is all any of us can do.

With class coming to an end, Daniels thanks the students for being so candid in sharing. She worries that some students still do not understand the arguments of critical race theory but she can cover them during the review session before the final. She thought the discussion was sometimes “messy” and other times “tense” but believes those emotions go with the territory of discussing real life, particularly race in the United States. She knows how Alexis feels but is glad that service learning has provided such a rich opportunity for some of her students to learn from others.



## THE PEDAGOGY OF WHITENESS MANIFESTED IN PROFESSOR DANIELS' CLASS

In this section, we analyze Professor Daniels' class for examples of how the pedagogy of whiteness pervades her teaching and, consequently, affects students' learning. This section is divided into three subsections: the instructor's assumptions and reflective stance, the framing and structure of service learning in the course, and teaching and talking about race. Each subsection addresses an important component of how whiteness pervades service learning pedagogy. Each one points the way to what instructors might do differently, a topic described at the end of this article. These sections are separate for the purposes of analysis, but they are not unrelated. In other words, the assumptions of the instructor affect the framing and structure of the service learning project, and the framing and structure of the service learning project shape, in part, the discussion about race in the class.

In conducting this analysis, we do not want to give the impression that all white students or all students of color have homogeneous experiences, prior knowledge, beliefs, and values. We do recognize, however, that experience, prior knowledge, beliefs, and values are shaped by race. Nor do we want to give the impression that Daniels, or other service learning instructors, should abandon service learning or avoid examinations of race because of the problems we point out. Indeed, doing so would be a more harmful instance of the pedagogy of whiteness by denying faculty and students the opportunity to engage in learning about race, racism, and privilege. Rather, we hope that by pointing out the problems in this service learning project, we can increase instructors' capacity and confidence to address such issues and in the final section of this article, we offer strategies toward that end.

### Instructor's Assumptions and Reflective Stance

At the beginning of the vignette, we note that Daniels' class is one of the most popular at State University. Eyler and Giles (1999) observe that service learning courses and their professors are among the most popular on campuses. Such popularity can lead to the potential downside of less reflection, not more. Dewey (1933) theorized that reflection is sparked by a "problem" and popularity rarely leads to "problematizing" one's practice, including service and reflection on service. We argue that this reflection on practice must also include a critical lens on race and privilege. Similarly, practitioners often see service learning as an unalloyed good thing. While service learning has many potential benefits, uncritical faith in service learning by instructors can obscure potential drawbacks or unintended negative consequences, such as reinforcing racist relationships between campuses and communities, and leaving students' racist thinking unexamined.

Professor Daniels' reasons for including service learning in her course are shaped by whiteness. She believes that service gives "real world experience" that is valuable for students, assuming students do not already have knowledge from or experience working in communities of color. That assumption may be true of white students in the class but most likely is not true for students of color in the class. Even in classes in which students of color comprise the majority of students, instructors, such as Daniels, may base pedagogical decisions about service learning for all students on the perceived needs of white students.

Daniels' attraction to service learning for its potential to encourage "border crossing" is based on this kind of attention to the needs and experiences of white students and making them normative for all the students in her class. Most white students in her class will not have attended the kind of urban school for students of color with which she is partnering. By contrast, many students of color may not be "border crossing" when they go to Wilson Middle School, but "returning home" to their community or a school much like the one they attended. For students of color, one of the most significant border crossings of their lives may have been to attend the university where Daniels is teaching.

Service at a school like Wilson can also be difficult for students of color from particularly difficult backgrounds who see college as a way out or an escape. Sending students "back" to their previous environment as part of a service learning experience can be a special challenge that is usually not considered by teachers. If the goal is for students to "cross borders" and examine educational problems and challenges, such as inequity and the achievement gap, some students may need placements tutoring in private schools or well-to-do suburban schools where they can also gain perspective on these sociological problems.

Daniels' notion that she benefited from being a "minority" during service experiences and that working at an urban middle school will be similarly beneficial for her white students is also troubling. Daniels assumes that merely being outnumbered by persons of color gives white students a "minority experience." This assumption implies that racial privilege disappears when white students are outnumbered at a service site by persons of color. While such situations may make white students unused to this phenomenon uncomfortable, white students still carry their typically-unexamined racial privilege with them into communities of color, with all the consequences that such privilege carries: not being stopped by security when they walk into the school, expecting automatic respect from students, believing that they can help solve the "plight" of urban education. At the end of their two-hour tutoring session, they leave the school and return to a world where they no longer think about their race, a privilege that people of color never have in the United States.

Finally, Daniels is rightly concerned about students' safety but the pedagogy of whiteness privileges white students' concerns about safety. Who may not feel safe in a neighborhood like the one where Wilson is located? Are such concerns valid or a product of assumptions about communities of color? If students of color were to engage in service at predominantly white private schools or suburban schools, would their concerns about safety (resulting from questions about whether "they" belong in "this" neighborhood and what they are doing) be addressed equally? Addressing all students' concerns about safety would de-center white students' normative perspectives about what safety is and who is safe where.

### Framing and Structures of Service Learning in the Course

Daniels' choices around implementing service also illustrate a pedagogy based on privilege. We appreciate the importance of making sure that students are not engaged in superficial experiences and her expectation of four hours per week can foster opportunities for more meaningful service and learning, build relationships, and inspire social, civic, and political commitment. Her rigorous expectations for service also assume, however, that service only "counts" when it occurs in the context of institutions, such as schools or nonprofit tutoring programs, a privilege of class perhaps

more than a privilege of race. Students who are single mothers may spend more than four hours helping their own children with homework or supplementing their children's education with arts and athletic opportunities cut from urban schools. Students who are part of large extended families may spend equally significant amounts of time providing quality child care for younger siblings while other family members work. Many students in college have commitments beyond schooling. Those commitments often include service-oriented work, civic service, and family obligations that can provide opportunities for achieving the same learning goals as service learning that exists as a separate responsibility solely for a college course.

The pedagogy of whiteness also can shape how service is framed for students, which in turn limits their opportunities to learn. In the case of this sociology class, service at Wilson Middle School is framed as a way to learn about the "problems and challenges" of urban education. Without denying the very real inequities and injustices of urban schooling, this service learning project could, in addition, be framed as a way to learn about "funds of knowledge" from the community (González, & Moll, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) to learn that communities have assets as well as problems (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1997). Without framing service in the context of also learning about resources and strengths in a community, we worry that white students might believe the community has nothing worth learning and that the only worthwhile lessons come from learning how to help those who are "underprivileged" or "unfortunate." This framing can lead to a deficit view of children of color in urban schools (Delpit, 1995) and fragment how white students understand their privilege, that is, as a reason to help others less fortunate, not as a result of structural inequities in society that have given them advantages.

Framing service only in negative terms also has consequences for students of color. It sends a message that instructors think they too must have been unfortunate or underprivileged and that the communities from which they came have only problems and challenges. Students of color may find that white students, or even the instructor, assume that they can explain phenomena at schools like Wilson or share experiences similar to those of students at Wilson.

Given that service was framed as a chance to examine problems in a school, perhaps not surprisingly, students return from their service site seeing only problems. Might white students in Daniels' class be identifying and seeing the situation at Wilson through the eyes of their own experience or from those of white teachers? In what ways are white students learning to see urban schooling through the eyes of the children of color or through lenses that consider systemic and institutional factors that shape children's behavior and achievement in school (Ferguson, 2001; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, 2003)? Daniels' observation that her students "usually" express their shock at Wilson and its students during the first class conversation implies that the course curriculum does not prepare students for what they will see or how to make sense of it.

### Teaching and Talking about Race

While Daniels does not entirely ignore the topic of race in her syllabus or her class discussions, the way she situates the topic and facilitates conversation about it lead to missed opportunities for everyone's learning. Postponing a conversation about race, especially in a course on the sociology of education in which it is particularly relevant, has unfortunate consequences. By waiting until the last class, race becomes the topic of one big, and for many white students, scary conversation

rather than a thread for continued thoughtful analysis over the course of months. Worst of all, a conversation about race in the last session of the course could surface ideas and feelings that would benefit from further examination, but instead have to be put aside. What might Daniels and her students learn if race were the topic of the very first class?

Even if 50 students could get to know each other well over a semester, waiting until the end of the semester to talk about race because students will know each other better and have a safe environment is a strategy based on unexamined white privilege for setting preconditions for conversations about race and insisting on a “safe” environment (Freire & Macedo, 1995). These “safe places” usually are not clearly defined, but they seem to imply conversations that are devoid of controversy, conflict, confrontation, and contention” (Gay & Howard, 2000, p. 5). By contrast, hooks (1994) maintains that safety precludes critical learning about racism. The kind of safety that white students in Daniels’ class might feel could lead them to think that race and racism are not salient to understanding their service or the dynamics in their classroom because “everyone is friends.” Worse, such safety might be seen as creating a space where students can talk without checking their assumptions or their facts.

Students’ comments during the class reflect several dimensions of the pedagogy of whiteness. Erik’s comment about the absence of racism implies that racism is aberrant and exists only in egregious examples and denies that racism might be systemic or that it could exist even in those who “care.” Joanne’s comment about poverty illustrates a privileged stance of wanting to shift the conversation away from race right at the beginning. While poverty is salient to conversations about inequitable schooling, so is race. Joanne may be less comfortable with an examination of race because it may point to her own unearned privilege. Daniels refrains from commenting on Erik’s and Joanne’s statements, not wanting to dominate the discussion or close off students who might be feeling tentative in talking about race.

Asking Tracey, an African American student to comment on Joanne’s observation, places an unfair burden on students of color, putting them in the position of teaching as well as learning and serving as a representative for all students of color, a problem that Tracey points out in her response. Calling on Tracey absolves white instructors from challenging white students’ assumptions and ignores white instructors’ responsibility to model for all, but particularly their white students, how to frame and talk about issues of race, racism, and privilege.

Alexis’ response illustrates how sadness falls within the boundaries of classroom discourse in the pedagogy of whiteness. Her response stands in contrast to Tracey who chose her words carefully and responded only on an intellectual and not an emotional level. Daniels’ empathy for Alexis illustrates how the instructor’s experiences and perspectives can privilege some forms of discourse over others.

While Daniels knows how to meet the emotional needs of white students who seem saddened by the stories of children attending Wilson, she is less certain about why students of color are silent in class discussions when talking about the homes and community in which Wilson students live. No doubt, Daniels empathizes with how her white students feel and may even share the same emotions even as she also has a sociological perspective on urban schools. Daniels may be less able to empathize with students of color who may be experiencing other emotions in response to service at Wilson and classroom dialogue shaped in large part by the comments of white students. Students of color may be experiencing anger at injustice rather than the sadness and pity of their white classmates. They may be experiencing anger at the assumptions and misunderstandings of white classmates. They may be tired of hearing talk about the problems of children of color in

urban schools but not seeing the will to remedy them (Hilliard, 1991). And students of color also know that while expressing sadness falls within the boundaries of accepted classroom discourse, anger—and particularly anger from a person of color—does not (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). They know that even pointing out the institutional racism of schools in a segregated United States and the redlining of banks that leaves people of color with fewer options for finding homes and how that benefits white children (Tatum, 2008) in response to a white students' question about why Wilson is an "under-performing" school may be construed as an "angry" reply by white students. So, unlike their white classmates, students of color are unable to express what they are feeling, thinking, and know in a class discussion and, instead, express nothing at all.

Taken together, the comments in the discussion do not build on each other. Students "share their truth" but do not engage each other's ideas in dialogue to come to new understanding. The absence of Daniels' voice in the discussion is notable, perhaps because of her own feelings of inadequacy about leading discussions on race or perhaps because she believes that such class conversations are valuable as long as everyone expresses his or her ideas. Were Daniels to take a more active role in the conversation, she could challenge students to unpack more of their assumptions and embrace different perspectives, ideas, and understandings.

Without the instructor taking a central role, the conversation remains at the surface level with students offering observations about others but not about themselves or about how racism and privilege shape their lives, how they can be agents of change in society rather than only in one other person's life, how race and racism are personal life issues rather than only academic subjects. Broadening the conversation and encouraging students' sophisticated introspection brings student reflection closer to Dewey's (1933) ideal: open-minded, responsible, and whole-hearted. This is particularly important for white students who may feel that thinking about race and racism is the responsibility only of students of color (Leonardo, 2009). The conversation ends on a note that change only happens at the individual level, when those who are fortunate help those who are less privileged. If the goal is for students to also consider making change at systemic, institutional, and political levels, the last class session leaves them with few ideas and no tools.

Although students should be encouraged to make, and appreciated for making, their thinking visible to themselves and others, Daniels' only comment—a note of thanks to everyone for sharing his or her ideas—privileges all the comments as good, meaningful, and truthful. It could also be taken as dismissive and perhaps exploitative, especially to students who see little growth, either individually or as a group, in understanding about race, racism, and privilege. Conversations about race can indeed be "messy" and "tense." The messiness and tension, however, are not the goal but often a corollary of productive conversation and disequilibrating growth or learning. Daniels reflects on the richness of the conversation, seeming to define rich conversation as a collection of many students' comments. If richness is defined by learning, challenge, and connection, the data are less conclusive.

## STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING THE PEDAGOGY OF WHITENESS IN SERVICE LEARNING

In this section, we offer strategies to interrupt whiteness in service learning and provide more educative experiences for all students. This section is also divided into three subsections mirroring

the analysis of Daniels' teaching. We examine how to check one's assumptions and take a more reflective stance on service learning, how to frame service learning and create structures promoting more thoughtfulness on issues of race, and how to teach about and lead discussions on race.

### Checking Assumptions and Taking a Reflective Stance

It is easy to say that instructors should check their assumptions. It is harder to do. Asking the following questions can reveal what we do and do not know about students, the community, and the goals for learning from service.

The first question is: Who are my students? A corollary to that question is: How do I know? Sometimes, faculty think they know who their students are based on an assumption about one characteristic, for example, a student's supposed race based on outward physical appearance. Instead, faculty should embed opportunities throughout discussions on service for students to connect what they see and the meaning they are making from service to their own backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs. Faculty can model this kind of reflective stance for students by making connections to their own backgrounds and experiences. They can also illustrate how those experiences are not universal and raise questions about how others might observe and analyze differently.

When planning a service learning course for the first time and when faculty have not met the students in their course, they can check their assumptions about their students as they plan. Are they imagining that students will share their assumptions about service and the community? Are they imagining that students will learn what they learned or would have learned from similar experiences? Are they imagining that their students will have the same needs as learners that they did when they were university students? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, faculty should ask: Who might think differently? Who might have different learning needs? They should then begin to design their course and service learning project from the perspective of meeting diverse perspectives and needs, not a single perspective or set of needs that is assumed to be universal. So, for example, if "border crossing" is a valued outcome of service learning, think about how various groups of students will see and experience those borders. This kind of assumption checking also applies to instruction. For example, when making suggestions about safety, think about whose safety and in what context. Do not assume that any student is safe in all contexts or that a context is safe for all students.

### Framing Service Learning and Creating Structures to Promote Thoughtfulness

Faculty should frame service learning not only as an opportunity to meet the needs of a community but also to explore a community's assets and strengths. This sends the message that community resources can contribute to students' learning. Faculty themselves need to understand the community's assets. While instructors may rely on centralized community service learning offices on campus to develop placements for students, visiting a site and building a relationship with those who work and are served there allows faculty to see community resources firsthand.

Faculty should select readings and tailor lectures to prepare students for their experiences and to see them through educative frames—for example, asset-based assessments of communities or

critical perspectives addressing systemic causes rather than only individual failings for community problems. Speakers from the community can come to class as part of panels so students head into the community with the perspectives of those in the community. These steps better prepare students for what they will encounter so that they will be less likely to draw on their own stereotypes (Marx, 2006). These strategies also relieve students who might be from those communities of the burden of being their classmates' teachers as well as students in a service learning class.

It is important to acknowledge that students have full lives including families and work. Think flexibly about how students might connect experience—experience they already have as well as experiences that might be created through a structured service learning placement—to meet the goals of the course. Doing so allows more students, not just those who are privileged to attend school full-time without other obligations, to connect course content to lived experience. Many students may already be translating for parents, volunteering in their children's school, or taking care of elderly relatives.

### Teaching and Talking about Race

In the same way that service learning projects need to be carefully framed and structured, so do discussions about race and racism that may be part of the reflection on those service experiences. While students might introduce race or racism into a discussion, the instructor should take the lead in doing so and be prepared. They should not wait until the end of the semester.

Faculty should play an active role in framing discussion. For example, before asking students to describe what they are seeing at their site, a better strategy would have been for Daniels to make explicit the biological fiction of race as well as its social reality. She might also have introduced racism as a system of advantages so students do not operate from a definition of racism as only extreme individual prejudice. Using Ladson-Billing's (2006) ideas about the education debt versus the achievement gap to reinforce thinking about structural inequities also might have contributed to a more critical conversation about race. These strategies would push some students' thinking, something that did not appear to happen in the unframed, less structured discussion captured in the vignette. An active role also can mean modeling how to rethink assumptions about race and describing how one's own thinking has grown.

Framing and actively leading the discussion also allows the instructor to connect back to big ideas of the course and avoid disconnected and mis-educative statements like those made by students in the vignette. The result is more likely to be a dialogue during which students listen to each other and consider what they say rather than the "popcorn" discussion of the vignette where speaking is more important than listening, thinking, and responding. Other ways to increase dialogue include starting with small group conversations, which allows more students to participate and respond, before facilitating a whole class discussion (Lang, 2008). Instructors can also partner with another facilitator for affinity group discussions during which white students and students of color address the same set of questions in separate groups and facilitators then share out the main ideas from each separate discussion. The whole class then discusses what was learned separately and together.

Leading the discussion means not being afraid to bring the discussion back to race when students consciously or inadvertently go off-topic. It means not making students into spokespersons

for a particular race. Leading a discussion about race also means challenging students when they say something mis-educative. Follow up on such statements with questions like, “What do you mean by that?” and “How do you know?” Ask them to define what they mean by racism if they seem to imply it is only about individual prejudice. Ask them how their observation would be different if they considered racism to be a system of advantage based on race. Taking the lead in a discussion also means being able to think about the discussion from many perspectives. For example, if an instructor notes that students of color are not participating in a discussion, the initial response should not be a technical strategy but, rather, a reflection on why students might not be participating.

## CONCLUSION

Because educational institutions are “central places where race is made and remade every day” (Lewis, 2003, p. 11), schools are institutions of social reproduction. Higher education perpetuates whiteness in its curriculum, its bureaucratic systems, and its methods of teaching and evaluating learning (Leonardo, 2009). Service learning educators who want to interrupt the patterns and privileges of whiteness must be able to recognize whiteness and question its construction, its invisibility, the normative privilege it conveys, and color-blind approaches to diversity and social justice. Leonardo (2009) writes:

To the extent that racial supremacy is taught to white students, it is pedagogical. Insofar as it is pedagogical, there is the possibility of critically reflecting on its flows in order to disrupt them. The hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates everyday school life and one of the first steps to articulating its features is coming to terms with its specific modes of discourse. (p. 83)

We hope this case and our analysis of it makes visible this hidden curriculum of service learning that helps construct white racial supremacy and normalizes the privileges attached to it, and we hope our suggestions for changes to the practice of service learning support faculty to interrupt its flows.

## NOTES

1. By acknowledging the pervasiveness of whiteness in service learning pedagogy and practice, we are naming the dominant lens through which service learning experiences are most often designed and implemented. It is important, however, to name the “unrecognized roots of service learning” (Stevens, 2003, p. 25) that emerge in the traditions of ethnic studies programs, historically black colleges and universities, and tribal colleges (see Garcia, 2007; Stevens, 2003) and are retained in current practice (see Evans, Taylor, Dunlap, & Miller, 2009; Sias & Moss, 2011; Yep, 2011). This history and these examples are an important counter-narrative to service learning pedagogy and practice.
2. Pulitzer Prize winning author Junot Díaz’s comments on white supremacy are an important reminder of why we use this terminology. He explains:

How can you change something if you won’t even acknowledge its existence, or if you downplay its significance? White supremacy is the great silence of our world, and in it is embedded much of what ails us as a planet. The silence around white supremacy is like the silence around Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the Voldemort name which must never be uttered in the Harry Potter novels.



And yet here's the rub: if a critique of white supremacy doesn't first flow through you, doesn't first implicate you, then you have missed the mark; you have, in fact, almost guaranteed its survival and reproduction. There's that old saying: the devil's greatest trick is that he convinced people that he doesn't exist. Well, white supremacy's greatest trick is that it has convinced people that, if it exists at all, it exists always in other people, never in us. (cited in Moya, 2012, para. 9)

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