# Exploring Difference in the Service-Learning Classroom: Three Teachers Write about Anger, Sexuality, and Social Justice

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This essay examines the impact of difference in the service-learning classroom and offers an overview of three approaches to creating community while engaging students in dialogues on difference. The authors reflect on the local pedagogies they create in response to the anger, tensions, and challenges that arise in the classroom and at the service-learning site. By composing this essay together, the authors hope to embody the collaborative nature of service-learning courses.

*Creating community . . . involves this most difficult work of negotiating real divisions, of considering boundaries before we go crashing through, and of pondering our differences before we can ever agree on the terms of our sameness.*
—Patricia Williams

Community is often the site of tension in the service-learning paradigm. We are often, as Patricia Williams describes above, teaching students to negotiate real divisions between town and gown, between the service-learning classroom and the expectations of the site, and between one another. The three of us, all experienced service learning scholars and teachers at predominantly white institutions, have also been thinking about the ideas of community and difference. To advance our understandings of service learning, writing, race, class, and gender, for this project we have come together to form our own small research community. While we are all teachers at predominantly white universities, our experiences differ according to our identities, the subject positions of our students, and the subject positions of the learners at the sites where our students serve. By working together as an intentional community

of researchers located at different sites, we hope both to challenge one another to think more deeply about race, class, sexuality, and pedagogy, and to replicate the intensity of collaboration that is such an important aspect of the service-learning work that we ask students to do. What, we wonder, will we learn by attending to our differences of race, sexuality, and location and placing our stories about service learning in dialogue with each other?

Several perspectives serve as touchstones for our dialogue, primary among them Beverly Tatum's applications of Racial Identity Development Theory. Tatum considers Racial Identity Development in the context of the classroom, illustrating that students arrive in our classrooms with different comfort levels concerning issues of race. Some students are still unaware that racism exists while others are both aware of racism and savvy about addressing issues of race and difference. Many students inhabit various stages along the continuum between these two extremes.

The variations that Tatum describes may be further intensified in a service learning classroom, where each student is at a different stage of readiness to talk about race and other issues of similarity and difference as these issues relate both to the university and to community settings. Some students have lived with or talked about race—and racism—all of their lives, while others have not had to confront racial difference until they enter service-learning or other community engagement environments. Some students feel an initial alienation or division from the people they encounter and need support as they learn to navigate unfamiliar environments both within and beyond the university (Dunlap, *Reaching*; Dunlap, Monroe, Green, and Davi).

Amy Winans also attends to students' willingness to engage in critical thinking about difference. In "Local Pedagogies and Race: Interrogating White Safety in the Rural College Classroom," she advocates crafting a local pedagogy based on location, demographics, and students' backgrounds to teach critical thinking and combat racism. As Winans writes, "Employing an effective local pedagogy in a predominantly white classroom entails taking students' ethical beliefs and goals seriously rather than seeing them as misguided assumptions to be worked through" (262). The two of us who teach in predominantly white classrooms must consider carefully the fears and "color blindness" expressed by white students in order to fashion a local pedagogy that works effectively to prepare students for encounters with differences at the service-learning site. Further, we must consider the ways in which students who encounter "difference" at the service site feel threatened. As Winans explains, "White students seek to

The second strategy that I use involves addressing race and class directly throughout the course through the course materials I select, the reflections that students write, and the ways students are asked to link the course materials with their service-learning experiences. While these strategies are useful in creating a local pedagogy, they are not guarantees against anger, fear, or guilt. Or, or more precisely—since anger, guilt, and fear are expected responses from students at various stages of racial identity development—they are not necessarily guarantees that students can work through their anger, guilt or fear in the limited time frame of a semester. Ultimately, my local pedagogy must be characterized by what Angelique Davi in the pages that follow calls "adaptability," and what Amy Rupiper Taggart and H. Brooke Hessler describe as "pedagogical change [in] ongoing response to the complex relationships and resources entailed in community-engaged learning" (154). By approaching race directly in my service-learning courses, I sometimes provoke the "heated exchange" that bell hooks finds makes some "students from upper-and middle class backgrounds . . . disturbed." Like the teachers and students from working-class backgrounds whom hooks describes, I tend to feel that "discussion is deeper and richer if it arouses intense responses" (187). But while these "deeper and richer responses" intensify the learning for many students, they also disrupt the orderly, middle-class conventions of the classroom.

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"Writing Fellows: Theory and Practice of Peer Tutoring," a credit-bearing service-learning course that trains students for work in our university Writing Center, provides the occasion to consider these tensions in one particular classroom setting. Writing Fellows includes a service-learning component through which students serve as writing tutors at local elementary and middle schools, adult literacy programs, and ESL programs. Students are provided with a variety of options for service, and over the semester are required to complete thirty hours of service in the community and in our school's Writing Center. Discussions of race, class, and language are prompted both by the readings—excerpts from Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children* and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, June Jordan's "No Body Mean More To Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," and additional articles on tutoring, teaching writing, and encounters with difference—and by the encounters the predominantly white tutors have with learners who are predominantly people of color. Conversations

about race and class are also initiated by students in the class, depending on their personalities, learning styles, service sites, service partners, and their various stages of racial identity development. Given these differences, including texts by Carter, Tatum, and McIntosh, as Michelle Dunlap suggests below, might better help students recognize their own racial positioning. Nevertheless, recognizing one's own racial positioning and the anger or fear associated with it does not necessarily diminish the anger or fear. In other words, the emotions are real and not simply stages to be moved through. The emotions must be acknowledged.

One such angry conversation happened between Amanda and Lucy, a pair of service-learning "partners," one white and one Black, who tutored together at a site for adult English language learners. The women drove together to the service site, and accounts of their exchanges peppered their journals and in-class reflections. Amanda, a white student who had grown up in a state with a large Latino population, was struck by the lack of racial diversity among the other students at Saint Joseph's. She initially expressed a strong desire and motivation to connect with Lucy, one of the African American students in the class. In a journal entry reflecting on a class discussion, she described her respect for Lucy:

> When Lucy spoke during the second class period about how she felt
> through high school when teachers told her that she wasn't good enough to
> be in AP classes, I wanted to listen to her story. Later, she told us that she
> found herself in classes as the only black female.... I was very touched.

As the semester continued, however, Amanda's perception of Lucy changed, influenced both by their service experiences and by the anger that circulated in the class, a mood that varied according to students' stages of racial identity development, their encounters at the service site, their responses to the course readings, and their exchanges in the class itself.

Amanda describes her changing attitude in her journal as she reflects on a conversation with Lucy en route to their service site when she talked about her best friend from home:

> One day when we were going to service, I was talking about M. [my best
> friend] and mentioned that she was black. Lucy said, "That's great . . . you
> have a multicultural buddy. Good for you."

In her journal, Amanda describes feeling hurt and angered by Lucy's response.

Simultaneously, however, Lucy's own stage of racial identity development included anger at the predominantly white campus and the racism she encountered there. As was true for the students Angelique describes below, the service-learning course provided Lucy with an opportunity to recognize the regular, subtle acts of racism that so many students of color encounter on a predominantly white campus. Because the course work included writing by Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Gloria Anzuldúa and others, Lucy's engagement in the course work—combined with her experiences tutoring ESL and her daily life on campus—created space for Lucy to recognize and articulate her anger. While this was a necessary stage for Lucy in her own development of racial identity, it complicated her relationships with some of the other students in the class. Lucy reflects on this process in her final self-evaluation:

> I definitely think that my journal on "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" is one of my best. This piece really helped me to explore some aspects of my life and race in general that I have never explored before…. "How To Tame a Wild Tongue" was one of the most inspiring articles concerning race that I have read. The author openly identified the common shame and inferiority that some may have about their race and then turned the shame to pride. Kind of like a homosexual movement encouraging others to come out. Letting them know that they don't have to be ashamed, but instead can take pride in who they are. It's not that I didn't know the things that she was saying, it's that it has never been so concretely defined and confirmed for me. I was really moved.

In conversations with me about the course, Lucy talked about her distress at some of the white Writing Fellows' responses to her anger at racism on campus, her frustration with the slow pace of change, and the poetry she had written for her Black church. These moments of anger crystallized during a particular class discussion on race when Lucy posed a question to the class: "Do you see color? You say you don't, but I know you do."

In her journal, Amanda reflected:

> This was the single most frustrating moment for me this semester. When we were discussing race, Lucy posed a valuable question to the class; but before we were given the change to answer, she both answered the question

and blamed us for something she had no way of knowing. Yes. I see color. I know that Lucy is Black, just as I know that Sara has red hair. When Lucy said this, I felt that she was accusing the entire class of racism.

I excerpt these journals from Amanda and Lucy because I think that they raise important issues about how students at different moments of racial identity development may or may not respond well to readings about race, class, and writing. Moreover, because Amanda and Lucy tutored together, the tensions caused by their different stages of racial identity development trickled out to the service-learning site. It is important to recognize that anger, guilt, and fear cannot be avoided as possible responses from students, and it is also important to consider how a local pedagogy can adapt to the particular conditions that emerge from the particular class in front of us.

Interestingly, I think that one of the difficulties in Amanda and Lucy's relationship was that each had difficulty in interpreting the other's stage of racial identity development. On one hand, in conversations, Lucy often expressed relief at hearing comments from the white students who she perceived as being "more honest" about their feelings about race; from my point of view, "more honest" seemed to be "more racist." Often the remarks that Lucy expressed comfort with were the questions that white students asked her about Black stereotypes or the stories they told her about overt racism they had participated in or heard about. In my estimation, Amanda was further along in articulating a white anti-racist stance than many of the other white students in the class, but Lucy didn't trust Amanda's stance.

This may be true in part as a result of white privilege. Few models for white anti-racism are available; in fact, when we tried to name white people who had worked against racism, the class was surprised at how few people we could identify. Plus, the stance of a white anti-racist is quite possibly more difficult to interpret—for both white students and students of color—than the stance of the white racist. As Winans writes, "For many white students, race and racism are virtually interchangeable" (260). While Amanda may have had a more nuanced version of race and racism and did want to be identified as "color blind," Lucy's adopted a position in that particular class discussion that all of the white students in the room were embedded in a color blind stage of white racial identity development. At the service site this translated into Lucy perceiving the white nuns who ran the site as "racist."

As Michelle Dunlap writes below, we need to be aware that students can transfer some

of their anger to us through their frustration with service learning, and we can—by sharing readings with them like those by Beverly Tatum and Peggy McIntosh—make them aware that guilt, anger, frustration, and fear are all expected components of the stages of racial identity development. Even so, crafting a local pedagogy is complex and depends on how students' conceptualizations of race and other factors—gender, class, etc.—evolve over time and can change from moment to moment. In thinking about the idea of a local pedagogy, we must consider the ways that different stages of racial identity development in a particular class affect the overall class dynamic. This dynamic is further complicated when we consider how white students' idea of "safety," rarely threatened in the predominantly white classrooms that students encounter in predominantly white institutions, is troubled by students' service-learning experience with people of color (Winans 254).

### Michelle's Story
### Close Encounters: Race and Sexual Orientation in the Service-Learning Process

I am a Black woman professor who grew up in somewhat economically challenged environments in Detroit in the 1960s and 70s. For the past thirteen years I have taught predominantly white students from relatively privileged environments at Connecticut College, a small, highly selective, liberal arts college in New London. As a black woman—and as the person requiring my students to engage in racially diverse, economically-challenged environments—I could be an all too easy target for the discomfort and anxiety that often accompany first encounters in environments that are very different from the ones in which the majority of my students grew up. In the pages that follow, I share some the local pedagogies I have developed.

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The contexts in which my students engage in service-learning are located typically within a 1-3 mile radius of the college, sometimes even within walking distance. In these settings, they meet indicators of a world both similar to and different from the college and form the worlds with which they are familiar. According to city records from 1999, minorities make up about 44% of the city's population and 73% of the public school population; about 10% are immigrants. Reportedly nearly 22% of New London's 25-and-up adult population has not completed high school, 7.4% of

its population is unemployed, and only 20% of residents have a college degree (New London School District). At the same time, New London is a close-knit community of great strength, accomplishment, and pride (Dunlap *Reaching*). Despite its many strengths, strides, and resources, the distance between the contexts from which my students tend to come and the contexts they encounter in the city often makes New London's urban challenges appear to them even more vivid and overwhelming.

Many students struggle when they first encounter economically, racially, and culturally diverse environments such as New London in significant or intimate ways, especially when they are away from the security of their caregivers and their home environments. For some students, service-learning experiences may provoke their first, emerging awareness of their own economic and racial privilege. Thanks to supportive colleagues, useful resources, and trial and error, I have begun to discover some of the many "triggers" of my students' anxiety and have developed responses for helping them to cope (Dunlap, Monroe, Green and Davi). To illustrate some of my students' struggles with regard to place, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, I turn now to passages from three different student journals and reflect on both my initial responses to what they shared and the sources of support we identified.

Student 1: *"What must we look like to these [minority] children"?*

> I am sure this is a typical thought, but the first thing that came into my mind was, "What must we look like to these children?" Here we are, a group of college girls, all white, all dressed up, there for only an hour in the day, ready to do art projects with them. Was it only in my head that I should feel ashamed, somewhat pathetic, useless, or did these kids have similar thoughts? *Who do these girls think they are?* Did the teachers think this of us? Perhaps it was only an insecurity of mine, a figment of my own imagination. Or perhaps those feelings arose from notions of what society has taught us to feel, how there are differences between people based on their gender, race, religion, etc. Perhaps they viewed us as nothing more, nothing less than people to play with them for an hour of their day. I guess I will never know. [Emphasis student's]

When I first began collecting and reading student journals, it was a challenge for me to understand the severity of students' struggle with feeling like an outsider. As an African American woman I am accustomed to initially feeling like an outsider when

crossing gender, racial, cultural, or economic borders; as is true for many minorities, the duality or what Dubois called "double-consciousness" of my existence is something that I live with constantly. So it was difficult at first for me to understand why a short-term, relatively protected situation such as service-learning was so overwhelming to my students. I had to find a way to stop, listen to my students, and allow myself to fully perceive the unique struggle they were trying to articulate.

I have since learned firsthand that coming to terms with their own image or sense of themselves is one of the greatest struggles students experience as they come into contact with the poverty, socioeconomic challenges, and systems of racism made apparent in service-learning environments (Dunlap *Reaching*). Students may look at themselves differently and feel insecure about how they are being perceived by others who may not immediately trust them, finding their own more heroic self-conceptions challenged (Dunlap "The Role"). Ideally, this disruption will provide an appropriate opportunity to bring students to a new place in their intellectual and development. Helping my students locate where they are in their familiarity and comfort with race and racial differences and similarities is one way of helping them to understand themselves within a larger framework or process of learning—a process that is not unique to them as individuals but is shared by many students.

Beverly Tatum's classic article on students' encounters with racial differences in the classroom, "Talking about Race," is a key support for my students. Normalizing their struggle helps students to feel less insecure, less self-conscious, and less defensive as they adjust and develop more realistic conceptions of their role within the service-learning environment (Dunlap *Reaching*). As they begin to better understand the emotional processes involved in learning about the environments that now surround them, they are better able to acknowledge their emotions and to grapple cognitively with and connect course content to the locales that surround them (Dunlap *Reaching*).

Student 2: *"I [had] never stopped to think about why our world is still so segregated."*

> I feel a huge amount of guilt after my first week of service-learning....
> because I never had to go to an after school program while my parents
> worked. I was fortunate enough to have an au pair to come and take care
> of my brother and me. When I think of the many opportunities these kids
> do not have I feel upset.... I do not know how long it will take for this

feeling to go away but in class after our discussion about race and guilt I know I am not the only one experiencing this. The interesting part is that I have been doing community service for years and never had the same awareness of race. I mean, I am by no means colorblind and therefore have always recognized the minorities I have worked with. But I never stopped to think about why our world is still so segregated. After reading so much about race and discussing inequalities in class, I feel bad for my status as a white in today's society. I know I have no control over it and am not to blame, but it is hard to face. I wonder what the kids I worked with this week thought of me. They may have preconceived notions of me as well…. I understand after reading Tatum's article that guilt is simply part of the process of learning about race.

Some courses and service-learning experiences provide students with the opportunity to consider and analyze the systemic causes and consequences of inequality for the first time. Resources such as Herbes-Sommers' documentary on the history of inequality in America and the many other texts mentioned throughout this article help to promote such analysis and to provide a context from which students may consider the systemic inequality they witness firsthand in their service learning placements. As students become more aware of systemic inequalities they may respond in a number of ways. One common reaction is guilt. As they draw on helpful resources they may find productive ways to channel emotions such as guilt and may be less likely to fear the wariness, cautiousness, and sometimes anger of oppressed people that Ann and Angelique also discuss. As the above student passage suggests, having an opportunity to reflect on their own emotional process within service-learning, and being provided key resources such as Peggy McIntosh's classic work on male and white privilege and Tatum's works on racial identity development are crucial to student adjustment in the service-learning experience. These resources help students tie their observations in the local service-learning settings to larger, systemic trends that have historical and sociological bases that extend far beyond the one setting where they are placed. These resources also help prepare students and faculty for the reality that racial and inequity awareness is an emotional process, encouraging them to put their emotional energies to work for the cause of racial understanding, communication, and action as modeled for them through such materials.

Resources such as the work of Tatum, McIntosh, and Herbes-Sommers have provided immeasurable support to me, making me far less likely to be scape-goated by students

as they grapple with their racial "stuff" or baggage, and far less likely to be seen as biased or as having a hidden agenda. My purpose and agenda for preparing them for the service-learning process and for a more diverse and ever-changing world becomes more obvious to them

Student 3: *"I lied and said I had a boyfriend named C—, when the truth is that I have a girlfriend named C—."*

> I am [working with] many seventh grade [girls], all who are students of color. There are more [college] mentors here than seventh graders, most of us are white. A few minutes into the session, I realized we were going to be dealing with the dating issue right off the bat. As a gay woman, this is an uncomfortable situation in surroundings where I am not sure how people will react to my sexuality.... One of the seventh graders went around and asked if we had a boyfriend and I found it strange that the facilitators didn't stop this. I wanted to scream out, tell them that I was uncomfortable, and that I had no desire to make others feel uncomfortable by me. When they got to me I froze, I lied and said I had a boyfriend named C—. The truth is I have been dating a woman named C— for almost a year now. [Then we all were asked] if we knew anyone who was Gay or Lesbian, this made me relax because it meant it was on people's radar and I felt more included. However, most of what people said was that gay men are really great, will always tell the truth and are fun to shop with, whereas lesbians hit on you and it's weird. We talked about events we will have, one of which is a sleepover, and I do not feel comfortable with that. I am now really nervous about this volunteering opportunity because it feels like I have started it with a lie. I am very comfortable with my sexuality and telling people, however, this was a very different situation.... I am nervous about slipping up about being gay, but also about [being Caucasian]. I am working on how it feels to be in the minority in a racial sense because I already feel that within a heterosexist society.

In a society that is often racist, sexist, and heterosexist, many students struggle with self disclosure. The above student is clearly wrestling with the decision and implications of whether or not to "pass." As I read her journal I was reminded of the many biracial African Americans who were faced with similar temptations and the devastating consequences of "passing" for individuals and families. Earlier in my

career, heart-wrenching disclosures such this student's would have overwhelmed me; I would not have felt that I could have credibility or legitimacy with lesbian, gay, and transgender students, when I myself am straight. Today, I respond much as I do when dealing cross-culturally with my students on whiteness issues: that is, to listen, learn, share, and locate and utilize resources and supports.

I should note that I often advise students that when they are not sure about what is appropriate in an environment to observe a supervisor or peer model as a guide. However, with disclosure of sexual orientation, a model may not be apparent or out in the open, even if they are present in the situation. And the lack of models may have the consequence of leaving the service-learner feeling even more vulnerable and isolated when trying to establish appropriate roles and disclosure boundaries within the service-learning environment. My written response to this student was: "This must have been a very difficult moment!" Later, where she said she would speak with her site supervisors, I responded with, "I hope you will share with me how it went." I felt a frustration about this situation and asked the student to see me personally so that we could process it together, and I could be sure that she was being appropriately supported. I encouraged her to: 1) speak to her site supervisors if she felt comfortable to do so in order to negotiate a process for handling such situations in the future; 2) utilize the on-campus supports for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students; and 3) continue to seek me out for support if I could be of further help. Such experiences help students to think in terms of how they—and thus others both alike and different from them—cope when they travel outside their own protective (or less protected) environments and move into other settings and systems.

**Not every student journal comment or situation requires a response, source, or intervention. Things often work themselves out on their own, especially if a good service-learning infrastructure is already in place.**

Not every student journal comment or situation requires a response, resource, or intervention. Often things work themselves out on their own, especially if a good service-learning infrastructure is already in place (Campus Compact).

There are, however, those occasions when a comment, redirection to resources, or full-blown intervention is required, and it may call for many different and simultaneous forms of support. Winans' concept of local pedagogies suggests that it is appropriate to consider a wide variety of experiential and contextual factors which, as Ann pointed out, are the very things that can influence the different ways that we hear, see, and perceive one another. Our role as facilitators requires our being ready to respond,

support, and point our students to appropriate resources, while we ourselves remain open to constantly learning and evolving in the process.

### Angelique's story
### Service Learning and Community:
### Students of Color in "White Spaces"

For the past three fall semesters, I have included a service-learning component in my basic writing course that is made up of predominantly students of color recruited to Bentley via an intensive summer bridge program, called the Contractual Admissions Program (CAP). Many of the students enrolled in my fall section have taken the prerequisite writing course with me during the summer. Although a majority of service-learning programs place students in underserved communities, students in my course tutor students at a local elementary school in a predominantly white, middle-class suburb of Boston through a previously established program entitled "2+2=5: The Power of Teamwork" designed by a Bentley student. Each week, the service-learning student facilitators lead elementary school students through activities designed to develop their teambuilding skills.

Much service-learning scholarship examines the experiences of white students from privileged backgrounds who serve in communities different from their own. Here, however, I reflect on the experiences of students of color and the anxieties they express while participating in a service-learning program in a predominantly white environment. In addition, I want to think about the ways in which my own identity as a white woman from a middle-class background plays a role in the classroom.

For the students of color in my course, many of their initial journal responses emphasize a desire to give back to the community. One Latina writes, "It is important to do some sort of community service because every little bit helps for the better of our community." Students anticipate feeling good about doing something for others: "I can admit that I have done lots of community service, particularly because of the feeling that you get after you have helped someone in need." These responses reflect what Ann Green describes as "the familiar story of how service-learning feels good" ("Difficult Stories" 277).

Although faculty teaching white students may find themselves having to encourage students to push past these feel-good narratives to tell "the difficult story" (Green 277), many of the students of color in my courses come to the difficult stories and

raise thorny issues more easily. One Latina writes:

> I am really excited to begin this new stage to our expos class!! This is time
> for me to heal my wounds by seeing what it is like for a teacher teaching
> little children. I'm really happy to be able to be nice and caring to these
> children. I can feel like I am making something RIGHT!

An African-American man writes, "I kinda hope that I find a kid kinda like I was at that age because I would have loved having someone like me to talk to." He adds, "I also hope that I make a difference in these kids' lives."

Both responses point to a recurring theme that emerges suggesting a different anxiety for some of the students of color in the course than the feelings expressed by most white students. Many students of color in my course perceive returning to the elementary classroom as an opportunity to rewrite some piece of their own past (Davi). The young woman sees her new classroom role as potentially offering her insights into her painful experiences as a child—painful enough for her to describe them as "wounds" that have yet to heal. The young man's observation suggests that something significant was missing from his own childhood.

While attention to race and class differences clearly occupies white students moving out of their comfort zones, anxiety around issues of race initially seems absent for students of color. Given the similar demographics of Bentley and the elementary school, students of color are unlikely to point to glaring distinctions of race, class, or gender between the university and the service-learning site. And many of them have spent their lives navigating cross-cultural differences between home and school. Indeed, students often remark after reading W. E. B. Dubois, that his notion of double consciousness is all too familiar to them.

Instead, anxiety stems from "getting it right." Many of these students describe having felt marginalized in elementary school and high school. Some describe exchanges with teachers that made them feel insignificant and even unwelcome. As they now enter the elementary school classroom as the person in power, many put tremendous energy into creating conducive learning environments. One woman describes a class activity and uses it as a way to rethink her approach in future sessions:

> Now we are outside, its time for us to see if what we talked about can be
> applied in this task. I believe that for the next meeting I am going to tell

them before the activity or have them brainstorm the goal of this activity
and how to go about it when they get outside.

She adds:

> Overall I was very happy with my group and I can't wait till next week
> when I see them again. I will use the new things that I noticed and the
> ideas that I have fostered from my previous visit.

In their on-line journal postings, they are thoughtful about what they said during
tutorial sessions, how elementary students react to their words, and how they might
approach a lesson differently in the future for better effect.

Despite the absence of anxieties stemming from issues of race at the start of the
course, students of color struggled with racial incidents both at the service-learning
site and on the Bentley campus. Coming into the course having already worked
with these students in the summer program, I was already aware of their sensitivity
toward and awareness of ssues of difference. In fact, in creating the course syllabus,
the first semester I used Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* hoping students would be
able to use the stories of Rose's students as a jumping-off point for analysis of their
own experiences. Winans describes this process of giving students the opportunity to
analyze other people's stories about their lived experiences of race as one of the "most
effective local strategies" in helping students develop a sense of their own understand-
ing of race (263). Indeed, students were able to better understand and articulate the
role of race in their own educational experiences with Rose's stories as context. One
African-American woman writes,

> I feel like my high school career was a life on the boundary. I went to
> a public school and did not receive the same high quality education as
> schools in the suburban area or private schools. This makes me feel as
> though they have a greater advantage in getting accepted into great colleges
> and succeeded in them better. Does anyone else agree with me?

A Latina student responds:

> I TOTALLY agree! My older sister went to the _____ , she had just
> come from Puerto Rico and did not know the language or the culture.
> When she was accepted into college at Northeastern, she felt as though she

was not prepared for the work in college. She did not know what a syllabus was or how to study. If she could only turn back time and use what she knows now then, she says her life would be much different and she would of been someone in her college. Do you believe that our leaders really don't know that this is happening? I believe that this is their strategy for them to stay in power and keep the people who would challenge their ideas and keep them at the bottom where they belong.

Another African-American student writes,

In the book it said: "You are finally sitting in the lecture hall you have been preparing to sit in for years. You have been the good student, perhaps even the star-you are to be the engineer, the lawyer, the doctor. Your parents have knocked themselves out for you. And you can't get what some man is saying in an introductory course." pp.174. When I read this it immediately touched me because that's how I feel in some of my classes sometimes. In my biology class often times the information and the course material can be so confusing and overwhelming that it feels as though the teacher is talking a different language. It feels like I am disappointing the people who supported me when I can't even understand what the professor is saying in the lecture.

Herzberg describes the students in his service-learning Expository Writing course becoming "indignant" (312) after reading *Lives on the Boundary*. He writes, "The students are indeed distressed by systemic discrimination against poorer people and disenfranchised groups" (312). The students in my course express the same indignation, but for them, the stories in *Lives on the Boundary* resonate with *their own* experiences of discrimination. Unlike Herzberg's students who "do not seem to see this discrimination in the lives of their learners" (312), the students in my course have little difficulty seeing this discrimination everywhere.

In fact, the first time I taught the course, students' frustration stemming from issues of race escalated throughout the semester. By midterm, I found myself somewhat unprepared for the level of stress and anxiety my students expressed in response to racial issues both at the community service-learning site and on our college campus. There were very few, if any, explicit racist incidents reported on campus that semester. Nonetheless, a number of factors were coming together for my students. First,

when they arrived on the Bentley campus for the CAP program, these students of color from working class backgrounds were in the majority. In the fall, though, the numbers change dramatically: 69% of the students in the incoming class of 2005 identified as white; 2% identified as African-American. Second, CAP students who throughout their elementary and high school years described themselves as on the margins were now being asked to perform a central role in an academic setting; they were the teachers in the elementary school program. And finally in our classroom through readings and written assignments, students were allowed to question all

aspects of the education system, including our own classroom space. In doing so, painful memories of racist incidents in elementary school and high school became "trigger events" for student anxieties (Dunlap et al.).

**By the middle of the semester, I found myself somewhat unprepared for the level of stress and anxiety my students expressed stemming largely from issue: of race both at the community service-learning site and on our college campus**

Given the sensitivity CAP students expressed towards issues of race throughout the summer and fall courses, I failed to keep in mind that each of them might be at a different stage of racial identity development. In fact, I watched as some students struggled through what Tatum describes as the preencounter stage where students of color have internalized "values of the dominant White culture" to the encounter stage, which is often triggered by an event that forces the individual to "acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life" (Tatum, *Why* 10).

For example, during the beginning of that first fall semester, one Latina student would often open class discussions by recounting experiences she had on campus, in high school, or at the community site that she perceived as racially motivated. Initially, rather than discuss the complexity of these incidents, the other students in the course would dismiss her comments and describe the problem as her "seeing everything" as a racist incident. In one exchange, she described a comment made by one of the elementary school teachers that was evidence to her that teachers can reinforce racist attitudes. Students spent a significant amount of time debating whether or not the comment was racially motivated, most seeming reluctant to name it as such.

By the middle of the semester, though, something had shifted for many of the students. Students' energy level dropped. During class discussions, they seemed less patient with each other. Whereas students used to tease and laugh over their differing opinions, they now seemed lacking in humor and more invested in being

correct. When I finally asked students about what I perceived as a change in attitude, even those few students who were initially resistant to naming things as racist were suddenly describing themselves as exhausted by the racism on campus. One woman said she was tired of the racism she was experiencing everywhere; she felt as though she couldn't get away from it.

After listening to students recount numerous incidents—both overt and subtle—I arranged for students to meet with the special assistant to the president who deals with cases of discrimination on campus. That afternoon in the administrator's office, it felt like most of the students of color had reached their breaking point. They described frustration with conversations in their dorms. They expressed disgust over seeing how service workers on campus were treated. Most significantly in terms of their racial identity development, they described feeling more aware of their race than they had ever been before.

Throughout the semester, I assigned readings designed to help students analyze the education system in the United States with attention to issues of race, class, and gender. Students read a piece by Fan Shen that exposes the classroom as a space that reinforces dominant ideologies. They applied Stuart Hall's notion of inferential racism to their experiences on campus at the community site. In reflecting on the course, I now realize both the students and I would have benefited from reading Tatum's piece on racial identity development. It may have helped students better understand their differing opinions, and I suspect my students would have been asking each other different questions and engaging in different debates had they been given these models of racial identity development.

In teaching the course for the third time, my local pedagogy continues to shift based on the needs and perspectives of the students. To help students further develop their analysis of the education system, I now also assign Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. The stories in Kozol's text serve as a point of comparison for the students as they find themselves in elementary classrooms. Kozol's text influences a Latino student to reflect in a journal posting on the physical classroom space. The student writes,

> Waltham Public Schools are in very good shape. The _____ School just
> underwent a major renovation. The school was in perfect condition. The
> halls were spotless. The equipment we used was in top notch shape. It was
> obvious the school had been recently built. Unlike inner city schools, the

town of Waltham has the money to make sure that the children have the proper working conditions to succeed.

During a conference, yet another student admitted to not liking Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*. She said she didn't like reading other people's stories, and since his didn't resonate with her experiences at all, she found herself even less interested. Her reaction to Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* started in a similar fashion. In one of her initial journal postings on *Savage Inequalities*, however. she begins to reveal the tension that it raises for her. The posting begins with the line "Every time I read *Savage Inequalities* I don't know what to think," and is followed by "I really like the book..." But I'm most intrigued by her critique of it:

> After a while though I feel like Kozol book is an attack on anyone who has gone to a suburban public school where upwards of $10,000 is spent on each student or a private school. Most of my life I attended schools much like Riverdale where there was something similar to the "well-tended park across the street, another larger park three blocks away..." (92). I am not sure if there is anything that can be done by the person that lives in the suburbs besides realizing that the playing field for everyone is not level and the advantage happens to be in their favor. I wish there was something more that could be done because it only makes me feel guilt that I am a part of what seems to be the problem with the unequal distribution of money.

This response has less to do with race and much more to do with class, as this student of color struggles to confront her own socioeconomic privileges. She also uses Kozol's text to think through her own approach in the elementary school classroom. Later in the semester she wrote:

> The connection to service learning ... is that I made a mistake that many teachers seem to make. I assumed that I might as well give up on the students when there was early disagreement on the team's name. I know that me giving up or leaping to conclusions about what the day was going to be like was a little mistake in comparison to teachers that are discussed in Kozol's book. Frequently those teachers consider their job as a joke and give up on the students over all.

Where she originally resisted the text, she comes to see useful applications of it in her own service experience.

Service-learning courses by their very nature seem to be less hierarchical spaces than traditional classrooms. Despite the planning that goes into any syllabus or course, I find service-learning courses demand greater flexibility and adaptability since each day's discussion and focus is determined in part by what students bring back to the classroom from the site and from their experiences. And as Ann points out, while we may anticipate certain responses to course readings, we can never predict how students will react. Despite having taught a particular text for several semesters, we find ourselves still surprised by the passages that catch our students' attention, challenged by students' questions, and invigorated by their passion. At times I have also felt frustrated and helpless.

> Service-learning courses by their very nature seem to be less hierarchical spaces than traditional classrooms.

Part of my local pedagogy has therefore been to share my process with my students. This past semester, for example, I used Jane Elliot's video *Eye of the Storm* to help students think about the ways in which young children grapple with discrimination. We eliminated some course readings and substituted others. We replaced discussions about writing with meetings with outside sources that might help them address their anxieties and frustrations. By asking students to become educators through a service-learning program and by allowing them to have a say in the direction of the course, I suspect they became more invested in their role as students on the college campus.

Both Ann and Michelle point to the unexpected and unpredictable in the service-learning classroom. Ann's experience highlights ways anger can be a very real and intense part of the service-learning classroom. Michelle's experience reminds me that all students, regardless of their background or experience, struggle as they cross borders. Both inside and outside the service-learning classroom, though, white students generally can choose to engage with or ignore the issues and feelings that stem from that border crossing. By contrast, most students of color cannot leave their pain and struggle behind until the next class meeting or service-learning session. Dealing with difference, prejudice, and oppression, for them, transcends the borders of the classroom.

Like Ann and Michelle, I, too, am required to assess the particulars of each situation, whether it is a classroom discussion or a student's journal entry, and to determine an approach that recognizes those particulars. As soon as I begin to think about the experiences of my students of color as uniform, I fail at my own local pedagogy. As a

white faculty member, I must be sure to question my own assumptions every time I walk into that classroom space.

## Local Pedagogy and the Safe Enough Classroom

In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Audre Lorde writes, "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" (15). As we craft our local pedagogies, each of us wrestles with this question of how to think about differences and the idea of community without, as Patricia Williams puts it, "crashing through." By addressing issues of difference directly via course readings, initiating conversations about race, racism and white privilege, and providing opportunities for students to reflect in writing about their processes of racial identity development, we have worked to create spaces in our classrooms where students feel "safe."

But rather than idealizing safety as a permanent or transcendent state in our classrooms, we instead work to create classroom communities that are "safe enough"—safe enough that students, teachers, community members, and learners from the service sites might challenge each other—and be challenged—to think more deeply about issues of difference. As we work to define difference as more than a dichotomy between Black and White—as a category that also includes sexual preference, social class, and gender—we struggle with finding "patterns for relating across our human differences as equals." The complexity of the service-learning paradigm leads us to conclude that developing a local pedagogy means taking students' concerns seriously and working with issues that students generate from the service-learning site and in the classroom.

The service-learning classroom can be an emotional space where students grapple with complex issues around difference. Flexibility in creating assignments, assigning readings, and responding to writing is critical in the non-hierarchical spaces created by the service-learning experience. As Angelique notes above, having the opportunity to raise issues and shape their classroom experiences helps non-majority students to become more invested in their roles on college campuses. Creating spaces for affective responses and acknowledging one's own implications in systems of power are also important strategies for facilitating students' learning. As Michelle writes, not every journal entry needs to be acknowledged, but affirming students' right to response is important. Finally, attending to relationships in the classroom can also influence how students learn. As Ann muses, had she been better able to incorporate more community building work into the classroom, Lucy and Amanda might have been better able

to find ways to learn across their differences. Relationships and trust were also key to Angelique and Michelle's interventions with students.

Service-learning pedagogy does not automatically bring issues of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation to the forefront, but in the safe enough classroom, engaging with communities gives the service-learning teacher rich opportunities not only to discuss "difference," but to complicate students' ideas of difference in ways that enhance their critical thinking, levels of engagement, and commitment to social justice.

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