

CHAPTER FOUR



Developing a Critical Consciousness

Four Elements of Critical-Consciousness Development

How can service-learning become transformative in nature and develop engaged citizens working for social change? The short answer is: *through developing a more critical consciousness*. There are four essential elements that contribute to critical-consciousness development: developing a deeper awareness of self, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of others, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of social issues, and seeing one's potential to make change. However, service experiences alone will not generate a commitment to social justice. We need to be intentional in the mission and design of the service program and create opportunities for students to grow in each of these four areas. Teachers must also work to become critically aware so that we can better guide our students in developing a critical consciousness.

Developing a Greater Awareness of Self

Effective service-learning opportunities help students develop a strong sense of self, giving them a sense that what they are doing is important. The ethic of service becomes a component of how they see themselves. Service experiences that are designed to give students opportunities to set goals, implement plans, and persist in their efforts increase their feelings of competency and efficacy. Doing work that has real impact on people and the community fosters a sense of agency and the belief that they can affect change. Additionally,



Figure 4.1. Four Elements of Critical Consciousness Development

when students take on leadership roles in service activities, it reinforces their self-image as capable and effective and increases their creativity, independence, and self-directedness.

Well-designed service programs encourage peers to collaborate on projects so they can realize helping others is both an enjoyable and a meaningful activity. Working with their friends is key for students because in searching for their own identity, they frequently look to others who are like them and have the similar values. High school and college peers who participate together in service activities often continue their commitment of service into adulthood.

Students become more aware of themselves as they clarify their values through reflection, discussion, and actions. Skillfully designed assignments and discussion provoke students to think about who they are now, who they want to become, how they will act, and what will be important to them. These discussions also contribute to their understanding of civic responsibility and a moral obligation to work for social justice.

Another element that helps students clarify their values is working with adults who are committed to social justice. Their parents, teachers, friends, and other adults who are working in service agencies addressing social issues are sources of inspiration, challenging them in their thinking and actions. Mentors and adults outside family relationships provide an objective affirmation of the value of service and the confirmation that everyone is responsible

for the common good. Students learn from these role models and come to identify with their values.

Students are increasingly seeking service opportunities away from their familiar surroundings. Often organized by schools, colleges, or religious organizations, these experiences include international travel or travel to impoverished communities within the United States. These experiences not only increase students' understanding about themselves, but also expand their awareness of others and knowledge of social issues.

Developing a Greater Awareness of Others

Often students' experience with otherness begins in their early years as a personal encounter with being different from their peers. Having a family situation or personal characteristic that sets them apart results in learning the meaning of *in-group* and *out-group*. This experience lays the groundwork for seeing diversity and developing compassion for others.

Most middle- and upper-class White students spend the majority of their time with people of similar socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. In order for these students to develop a commitment to social justice, they need to experience diversity and be in relationships with people who have different life experiences. Not only does this break down stereotypes but, along with accurate information and reflection, it puts a human face on suffering, fostering care and compassion. These encounters dismantle the wall between "us" and "them."

Students' self-awareness and awareness of others increase as they work with agencies serving diverse populations. Working with people from different ethnic or racial backgrounds, people living in poverty, or individuals with physical or mental challenges initiates a student's exploration of difference, similarity, and diversity within inclusiveness. Students come to see people as individuals with their own stories, rather than as statistics and stereotypes. Through these experiences, students recognize other ways of living and thinking, which encourages them to be more open-minded and to see the world from other perspectives.

Encounters with otherness help students overcome their fear of the unknown and lay the foundation for future social-justice work. Understanding the significant role that circumstances, which are often beyond one's control, play in people's lives allows students to see how misfortunes could befall anyone. As students create relationships with diverse people, it opens avenues of caring, *empathy* (the ability to understand and share another's feelings), and *compassion* (a general sense of responsibility and tendency to

make commitments).¹ Reflection promotes a sense of interconnectedness between people and a will to act to relieve suffering.

Developing a Greater Awareness of Social Issues

Accurate information, constructive service experiences, and critical reflection develop students' critical consciousness of the world. When students become more aware and informed about sociopolitical issues, they realize that what they had previously believed is often inaccurate. Those beliefs no longer adequately explain the reality they see through their service work with diverse populations and communities.

Students see the contradictions between what they (and society) say they value and believe in and the injustices they see others experiencing. This creates a dissonance that destabilizes their worldview and leads to self-examination and questioning. Given new information and opportunities for reflection and analysis, students accommodate new knowledge and develop a critical, complex view of the world. As students build relationships and gain perspective, they see how power affects political decisions and limits options for oppressed groups, which contributes to their understanding of institutional, rather than individual, causes of injustice.

While students need only travel fifteen minutes to see examples of injustice and people living in poverty in their own communities, having a study or service experience abroad can have a powerful impact on how students think about themselves, others, and sociopolitical issues. Seeing the reality of economically disadvantaged people overseas sparks students' reappraisal of their values, beliefs, and knowledge. Positive encounters continue to develop their sense of connectedness with others and increase students' ability to see the complexity and interrelatedness of economic, social, and political situations. With opportunities for reflection and social analysis, they begin to see how government and policy decisions in the United States affect other countries and peoples.

Seeing One's Potential to Make Change

Once students understand that the world is more complex and social problems are more widespread than they thought, service-learning becomes a vehicle for acting on their beliefs and making a difference. Witnessing poverty, discrimination, and injustice presents an opportunity for students to step back and compare their privileged world with that of others and question, Why? This often leads to more research and analysis and contributes to students' political formation and commitment to civic engagement.

The double negative used by several alumni in talking about service: “I couldn’t not do it” illustrates the long-term impact on students who value the camaraderie of service when participating with friends. This is one strong reason why providing multiple service opportunities in their high school and college years helps to instill the value of service to others. These early peer service opportunities coupled with parental and school role models create an ethic of service that continues throughout their adult years.

As a result of discussion and reflection around the questions, “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” in conjunction with “Why are there social problems and injustices?” students develop a commitment to the common good and praxis for social justice. People who have a clear sense of their values and who see service as a part of their identity are more likely to live in accordance with their beliefs. They also tend to connect their personal commitments to service with jobs or professions where they can make a social contribution.

Three Stages of White Critical-Consciousness Development

As students grow in their ability to see themselves and the world more clearly, their views and orientation to service change as reflected in a three-stage model of White critical-consciousness development. The initial stage of consciousness—charity—is a natural point of departure for many White, middle- and upper-class students who have little experience with discrimination, poverty, or diverse racial and ethnic groups. In the second stage, students’ worldviews are emerging, and their service orientation evolves into caring about those they are helping. The final stage of White critical consciousness incorporates an understanding of the underlying causes of injustice and a commitment to work for social change. To understand these stages and the importance of helping students foster a critical stance to their

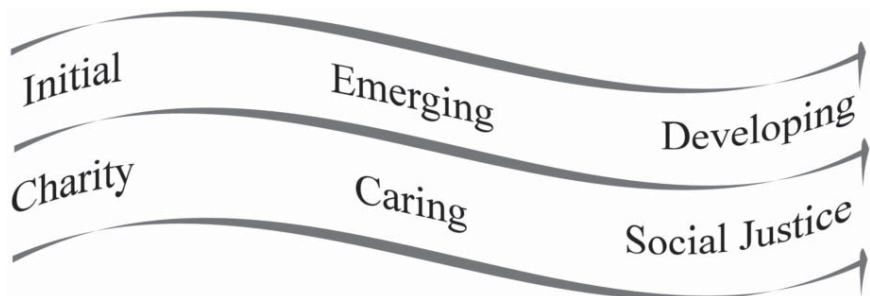


Figure 4.2. Stages of White Critical Consciousness Development

service experiences, we need to address some fundamental issues regarding charity, caring, and social justice.

Is Charity Bad?

Is charity bad? Of course not. Charity, as described by Merriam-Webster, is commonly understood as “generosity and helpfulness, especially toward the needy or suffering,” is a necessary component of our society and the human experience, and there are many schools and organizations that contribute to their communities through charitable projects such as food drives, fundraising, raking yards for the elderly, tutoring, helping with youth clubs, and environmental work.

Research indicates that altruism—helping others without any expectation of personal benefit—is an innate part of human nature. Felix Warneken and Michael Tomasello report altruism in infants as young as eighteen months. Twenty-four toddlers were presented with an adult male experimenter who encountered a problem, such as dropping an object he could not reach or knocking over books. Without the adult looking at or speaking to the child, the infant got up and helped the adult. Of note was that the child only helped complete the task if the experimenter seemed upset at not being able to reach his goal.² Indeed, if the desire to help others is imprinted on our human nature, what is problematic about charitable service-learning programs?

The charity-or-justice debate is a major tension among service-learning advocates. Teachers and administrators question whether service-learning programs should be apolitical or a vehicle to engage students in political, economic, and social issues. Questions raised over a decade ago, such as what are the goals of the program? whose values are being promoted? whose needs are being met? and who is doing what to whom and for what reason?³ are still relevant today. The answers to these questions guide the goals and orientation of any service program: one based in charity, the other oriented to social change.⁴

Program orientation is often based in a teacher’s view of society. Some educators believe that society tends towards equilibrium, with everyone in the proper position. They deem the division of labor a necessary component for a properly functioning economy and think the poor only need opportunity, not power. They do not see social barriers to equality and look for peaceful integration of people into existing structures. Their service-learning programs partner with agencies that cooperate with power holders.⁵

On the other hand, there are educators who see society as divided between dominant and subordinated groups, such as corporations and workers, men and women, and Whites and people of color. They design service-learning

programs that work to eliminate injustice through collective action for social change. They organize at the local level with the desire to create a social movement for change. Typically, White, middle-class people, who do not recognize institutional discrimination, tend toward charity programs, and people of color who have suffered institutional discrimination tend toward social-justice service-learning.⁶

The majority of K–16 service-learning programs are charity based and apolitical with a primary focus on student development.⁷ Often administration and teachers do not take a justice-oriented stance because they are afraid of losing bipartisan support and funding and do not want to appear to endorse a biased curriculum. Advocates for social change, however, note that universities and communities have a long history of uniting to advocate for justice, as in the civil rights movement, and challenge educators to prepare students to be engaged citizens.⁸

The question remains: What is wrong with charity-based programs? Advocates for social justice critique several aspects of these programs. First, they contend that apolitical education is not possible. Education in general and all service-learning programs in particular are political in that they either support the status quo or work to change it. The decisions surrounding mission, curriculum, methods, and type of reflection all have political dimensions.⁹

We see this more clearly by looking at the concept of service-learning and developing active citizens. Most institutions agree that service-learning is an effective strategy to achieve civic engagement goals,¹⁰ but citizenship means different things to different people. As Kahne, Westheimer, and Rogers suggest, being a good citizen can range from paying taxes and obeying laws, to being active in civic affairs and organizing food drives, to questioning, Why? and working to change the system. Depending on your perspective of what makes a *citizen*, service-learning programs can either support an agenda minimizing the role of government in addressing the needs of the poor, or they can develop a transformative agenda to create more just policies and social practices.¹¹

A second area of critique is the missionary ideology of White, privileged students going into areas of poverty to “do for” the poor.¹² Without adequate preparation and knowledge about the populations served, their social and political contexts, and an understanding of discrimination, racism, and classism, students’ service experiences often reinforce stereotypes and promote a paternalistic attitude toward those they are serving. Seeing these individual acts of kindness as the “least we can do” cements the notion of being saviors for the poor.

Another potential negative effect is the students’ exploitation of those they are helping for their own personal growth and opportunities. I often

hear people comment, “It feels good to help the poor,” “I get back more than I give,” or “Volunteering looks good on a college or job application.” While these volunteers are providing a needed service, the motivations are not truly charitable.

A final criticism of charity service programs is that they tend to maintain the status quo of inequity rather than work to create a more just society. When service is seen as an individual act of one person helping another in need, we do not develop the broader perspective of societal inequity, and it limits our ability to address the root causes of injustice.¹³

Having a willingness to help others and devoting time and effort to charity are good, but given the potential for charity-based service-learning programs to reinforce stereotypes, exploit those being served, and impede social change, we should see it as a beginning stage and help students develop a critical stance.

Caring: What Does It Mean to Care?

Care can be interpreted in many different ways. It can mean to help by providing for someone’s needs. Likewise, we say *care* when we mean giving something or someone a great deal of attention to avoid a problem, as in doing something “with great care.” *Care* can invoke the idea of interest or worry, as to be anxious or upset about something, such as, “I care about global warming.” We use *care* to mean providing people or animals with what they need and protecting them, especially where they are young or ill and can’t take care of themselves. *Care* can quite simply mean to like, as in, “I care for Bill,” or “I don’t care for brussels sprouts.” In the expression “to take care of” someone or something, *care* means to be responsible for him or her or it, and do whatever needs to be done.¹⁴

How are we using the term *caring* in the second stage of critical-consciousness development? At the core, it is about the relationship between those providing and those receiving service. We can draw on the work of Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan to deepen our understanding of what it means to care.

Noddings has written extensively on the ethic of care as it relates to education and society. Her work offers insights into the feelings and connections students should develop in their relationships during service-learning experiences. She describes caring as having regard for someone by giving attention to and having concern for him or her, which includes considering that person’s needs and desires. Noddings discusses *disposability*, derived from the French word *disponibilité*, meaning investing in someone and making yourself available to that person. Like the expression, “I’m at

your disposal,” disposability conveys, “I am here for you” and implies, “I care enough to make a commitment.”

Engrossment is another concept Noddings uses to express empathy developed from “feeling with” someone. Engrossment involves receiving another person’s feelings as your own, rather than simply projecting how you would feel if you were in that person’s position. It is a crucial difference in perspective. Rather than putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes and intellectually analyzing how we would feel in an objective manner, engrossment involves receiving the person into oneself and actually feeling his or her emotions. In her model, caring involves changing our personal frame of reference in order to feel the other’s point of view. The first step in developing this critical awareness is realizing that the situation of the person for whom we are caring could happen to us. This is often a catalyst for action. When we see someone’s reality as a possibility for us, we feel compelled to act to remedy the situation.

Noddings believes that relationship is at the center of caring and acknowledges the mutual relationship between the giver and recipient of care. Both the caring and the cared-for contribute to the relationship: care must be received and accepted by the person being helped. The cared-for looks for a sign that the one caring has genuine regard for him or her and is not just providing a routine, meaningless service. Without trust and acceptance in the relationship, the person cared for is dehumanized and feels like an object.¹⁵

We can easily connect Noddings’s theories to effective service-learning practices by examining the role of mutuality and reciprocity in the relationships between service providers, community agencies, and community clients. Service-learners must recognize that while they are contributing a service to the community, they are also benefiting from the experience and taking away important knowledge and personal growth from their interactions. To avoid exploiting those we serve, we must really care, have regard for them, feel with them, and invest ourselves in addressing their needs.

Similarly we find parallels between the stages of critical-consciousness development and Gilligan’s research on the stages of moral development. She delineates a progression from *preconventional*, to *conventional*, to *postconventional* based on relationships with an ethic of care. In her initial stage of caring, people are egocentric and make decisions based solely on what is in their best interest and for their own survival. Then, in transitioning to the second stage, individuals recognize their responsibility to others and focus on caring for them, often in a self-sacrificing way that puts the needs of those cared for above their own.

The catalyst to move into the third stage of moral development is recognizing the inequality in the self-sacrificing relationship and realizing that the care giver is also worthy of consideration and care. The focus of the third stage is on the dynamics of the relationship and the interconnection between the other and oneself.¹⁶

Drawing parallels between Gilligan's theory and how students progress through the stages of critical-consciousness development, we see how students move from charity—"it's mainly about me," to caring—"it's all about them," to social justice—"we need to work together." At the charity stage, students are mainly concerned about themselves, how they feel, and what they get out of the experience. In caring, students begin to develop relationships and consider the needs and feelings of others, and they see it as their responsibility to improve opportunities. At the last stage of social-justice activism, students realize that dismantling an unjust society is in everyone's best interest and requires working in solidarity for our common good.

As a concluding observation, we find an analogous understanding of care by looking at progressive health-care practitioners. Gone is the authoritative, paternalistic health-care-provider-as-expert knows best, declaring what is to occur and demanding passive acceptance. Rather, today's practitioners demonstrate a concern for the well-being of their patients, engaging them as active partners in selecting and meeting their health-care goals. Caring in this therapeutic relationship is "the commitment to alleviate another person's suffering [which] entails the willingness to become personally involved."¹⁷

Social Justice: What Makes a Person Say, "I can't not do it"?

There are two situations that channel us toward social-justice advocacy. First, when we have a keen awareness of our core values, and are committed to ideals of justice, freedom, and liberty, believe that all people are of equal value, deserving of basic human rights and dignity. We are moved to act on our beliefs when we develop relationships with those we are helping. It is through these relationships that we come to care about individuals and personally invest ourselves in them and their situation. We see their suffering and feel an obligation to do more than provide assistance; we feel it is our responsibility to work for systemic change to end the circumstances of injustice. When we really care, we have to act.

The second situation leading us to a social-justice stance is confronting the contradictions between what we previously thought and the reality we see. Those experiences create a dissonance that forces us to reevaluate our view of reality and what we had known to be true. We need to examine

our past biases and faulty assumptions to accommodate the knowledge acquired through service work. We begin to alter our view of others, the world, and ourselves as we come to see how society is based on dominant and subordinate groups and how power and privilege are used to maintain the status quo. This very difficult, often painful experience requires breaking through *hegemony*.

Although hegemony affects everyone, it is not a term familiar to most people. *Hegemony* is the “common sense” understanding of how the world functions and why situations are as they are. To make the concept more tangible, I often think of hegemony as a thick fog or a heavy blanket that covers us, preventing us from seeing reality accurately. Breaking through this barrier is not easy but leads to developing a critical consciousness.

Invisible, yet all-pervasive, hegemonic messages are unconsciously accepted into our minds and regulate our thinking and behavior. Hegemony is so embedded in society and in people’s ways of thinking that it projects an accepted view of how the world is, how it has always been, and how it will continue to be.

Hegemony, representing the dominant class’s worldview, serves to reinforce the status quo and the power of the privileged class. These ideas are spread through culture, media, and institutions such as schools and churches. The beauty of hegemony is that its messages are so ingrained in the culture that we regularly accept them as our own, even though it is against our best interests. We consent to practices and policies that maintain a society based on injustice and special interests.

A few examples further explain hegemony. If we examine how media, politicians, and ordinary people use language to hide and distort meanings, we can take the first steps toward breaking down myths and stereotypes. At a very young age, we learn that the United States is founded on the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice. These notions are supported by myths such as “racial discrimination is against the law and therefore only exists among a few uneducated people”; “all immigrants can become part of the American melting pot”; and you can “pull yourself up by your bootstraps.”

These myths promote the idea that we are all equal and have the same opportunities for social advancement if we simply work hard. The reality is that the playing field is not level, and due to racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other institutionalized bias, life is stacked against some and favors others. Stereotypes of people of color, women, and those living in poverty are often reinforced through the home, media, and even school curricula, which provide “common sense” explanations for the differences we see among people and their socioeconomic statuses, such as “boys are

better at math than girls,” “if they would just learn to speak English . . . ,” and “certain people don’t want to work.”

Breaking through hegemony involves making the invisible visible. In our classrooms we can follow Paulo Freire’s path to help students unveil the world of oppression by encouraging them to think critically, engage in critical dialogue, and problematize the reality they see. Why is a particular situation like this? Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged? What are the barriers to change? We should not tell students what to think, but rather enable them to think critically and encourage them to question, challenge, and change reality.

Putting the Pieces Together: Service-Learning, Critical-Consciousness Development, and Social Justice

With an understanding of the elements and stages of critical-consciousness development, we can trace the connection between them through service-learning experiences. As students navigate the road map of critical consciousness, their view of themselves, others, and social issues, and their potential to make change, mature. Table 4.1 presents three portraits of service-learners and maps their transformation as they move through the three stages of critical-consciousness development. While the matrix indicates a directional development, we need to acknowledge that growth does not necessarily occur in a lock-step process. People may be at different levels at the same time and may at times loop back before further advancement. Additionally, since growth is additive, those who have reached the developing stage retain their charitable and caring natures.

“Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he will eat for the rest of his life.” This common proverb provides an image for the charity and caring stages of critical-consciousness development through service-learning; but to complete the metaphor we need include the social-change aspect and make room at the river for all to fish.

Ethic of Service: Why Do I Serve? How Do I View Service Work?

As individuals become more critically aware, their ethic of service moves from charity to caring to social justice. These changes are seen in their orientation to service and their motivation to serve, as well as in awareness of the reciprocal nature of service-learning. In the initial stage, students’ orientation to service is based on charity, and they are motivated to give back to the community because they have so much, but also because helping others

Table 4.1. Stages of White Critical-Consciousness Development and Service-Learning

		Initial: Charity	Emerging: Caring	Developing: Social Justice
Ethic of Service	Metaphor	Give a fish.	Teach to fish.	Make room at the river for all to fish.
	Service orientation	Charity: give back to community <i>Do for others.</i>	Caring: compassion & empathy <i>Do for, but are in relationship with, others.</i>	Social justice: systemic change, work in solidarity <i>Do with others.</i>
	Motivation to serve	"Helping others feels good." "I learn a lot." "A great opportunity."	"I can make a difference." "Sense of efficacy & agency"	"My liberation is connected to yours." "I can't not act."
	Reciprocity in service	"I get back more than I give."	"I receive & contribute."	"We work together for common good."
Awareness of Self & Others	White racial-identity formation	Color-blindness <i>Do not see their own race.</i> "I don't see race."	Awareness of racism, but don't know what to do <i>Often feel guilt & frustration.</i>	Potential to be White antiracist allies to people of color <i>Begin to unlearn internalized racism.</i>
	Diversity	Everyone is the same or everyone has differences.	Acknowledge differences, value diversity.	Interconnectedness: diversity within inclusiveness.

(continued)

Table 4.1. (continued)

		Initial: Charity	Emerging: Caring	Developing: Social Justice
Awareness of Self & Others	View of the other	Deficit view of others: "less fortunate, disadvantaged" <i>Stereotypical: some deserve help, others don't.</i>	View others as individuals, each with own story, not stereotype <i>Realize "it could be me."</i>	View others as equals: community members seen as strengths & resources <i>Are connected to others.</i>
	Reflection on self & otherness	Unaware of self in relation to otherness <i>Think everyone is basically the same.</i>	Compare others' lives to theirs <i>Begin to question beliefs, attitudes, & what has previously been taught/learned.</i>	Critical reflection on assumptions, privilege, oppression, power structures surrounding race, class, gender, etc.
Awareness of Social Issues	View of the world	World is simple & basically good. <i>Some people need help due to dysfunctional families, poverty, or poor education.</i>	World is bigger & more complex than thought. <i>See inequity & contradictions between societal stated beliefs & reality.</i>	Injustice is inherent in social, economic & political systems on a global level.
	Source of the problem	Individual responsibility: "if everyone just tried harder" <i>"Pull oneself up by the bootstraps." Blame the victim.</i>	The need for government to protect & ensure basic rights for all <i>Avoid judging others for situations out of their control.</i>	Policies & practices maintain & reproduce the status quo that favors certain groups at the expense of others.
	View of social justice	Increase resources.	Treat people fairly & increase their opportunities.	Examine root causes of injustice & work for systemic change.

in need makes them feel good about themselves. Describing this win-win situation, students often state they “get back more than [they] give.” In this stance they are “doing for” others.

As students emerge into critical consciousness, their orientation to service becomes one of caring. As a result of seeing injustice, they develop empathy and compassion for the people they are helping and feel morally obligated to ease their suffering. As a result of past service experiences, students gain a sense of efficacy and agency and are motivated to serve because they know what they do matters. They become aware of the reciprocal relationship between those providing and receiving service, acknowledging what they are gaining in terms of knowledge, perspective, and personal growth. At this stage, service providers are still “doing for” others, but the difference is that they are in relationship with those they are helping.

The orientation of service at the developing level is one of social transformation for equity and justice. White, privileged individuals come to realize that both the powerful and the powerless are dehumanized when oppression and injustice are allowed to continue. They see the connection between their liberation and that of subordinated groups and commit to work in solidarity with them. Individuals in the developing stage feel morally obligated to make the world more just and work as allies with oppressed groups for the common good. They “do with” others.

Awareness of Self and Others: “What’s race got to do with it?”

Gaining a greater awareness of self is so inseparable from having a broader perspective of others that we need to discuss these elements of critical-consciousness development together. The number one task of White people in this country is to understand the social construction of race and the role that race, racism, and White privilege has played in history and continues to play today. As we grow in this understanding, we develop more accurate views of others, the world, and ourselves. As students move from charity to caring to social justice, they develop a greater understanding of identity formation and diversity.

Students at the initial level of critical consciousness are unaware of race. We often hear them say they are color-blind and “don’t see race.” In addition to not seeing others’ race, they are unaware of their own Whiteness, because color blindness is an expression of White privilege. Uninformed about historical and current social inequalities, students believe that discrimination no longer exists and that we are all the same or we all have differences. At this stage, service providers hold a deficit view of those they are serving, referring to them as less fortunate and disadvantaged. Their view of others is

stereotypical, and they believe some people are deserving of help, and others are not. They are unaware of themselves in relation to otherness and believe everyone is basically the same.

Students with an emerging critical consciousness see difference and value diversity. Usually as a result of relationships with people of color, they become aware of racism, but do not know what to do about it and often experience discomfort, shame, guilt, and anger. Their service activities enable them to see those they are helping as individuals, and poverty statistics become real and meaningful. Students compare their own situation with that of those living in poverty, and realize the role of chance in determining one's situation. In the event of unemployment, illness, or family change, many of us could easily find ourselves without money for basic needs. New perspectives and understandings compel students to question previously held notions and beliefs about others and critique what they have been taught as truth.

As individuals reach the developing social-justice stage of critical consciousness, they see their potential to be White antiracists and to work as allies of people of color in fighting injustice. The first task is acknowledging internalized racism and beginning to unlearn racist ways of thinking and being. Through relationships with others and personal reflection, they appreciate the interconnectedness of humanity and create spaces that support diversity within an inclusive environment.

These students view all people with dignity, seeing them as worthy of love and deserving of basic human rights. Their view of others changes from deficiency to one of strength, seeing community members of oppressed groups as strengths and resources for addressing social injustices. Critical reflection leads them to continually question their assumptions and privilege and reveals power structures that perpetuate discrimination against oppressed groups based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, and other biases.

Awareness of Social Issues: What's Really Going On Here?

Gaining a greater awareness of social issues involves having an accurate view of the world, understanding the sources of contemporary problems, and considering how best to solve them. To students in the initial stage of consciousness, the world is basically good and full of hope for all who want to take advantage of opportunities. Social and economic advancement is based on merit, which means all those who work hard can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. They understand that some people need help, but think it is usually due to a dysfunctional family, poverty, or poor education. The answer to economic and social problems is to increase resources through donations,

collections, and drives. In charity-based service programs, students receive long-term benefits in terms of personal growth and academic achievement.

Caring moves service-learners into the emerging stage of critical consciousness. As they reflect on the injustices they see around them and the contradictions between societal beliefs and principles and lived experiences, they realize the world is bigger and more complex than they had thought. Students question the government's role in protecting and ensuring basic human rights for all. They avoid judging others for situations over which they have no control. Their view of social justice is treating people fairly, and they work to increase opportunities for those in need.

Service activities at the emerging stage involve working in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and food shelves. Students also work at drop-in centers, posttreatment housing projects, and schools serving students who live in poverty and/or come from immigrant populations. Other marginalized populations served are the elderly and those living with mental or physical challenges.

Students at the developing stage of critical consciousness recognize that injustice is inherent in social, economic, and political systems on a global level. The sources of injustice are governmental and corporate policies and educational practices that support and reproduce the status quo, favoring privileged groups at the expense of others. As a result, they seek social justice by examining the root causes of injustice and working for systemic change. Service work at this level can no longer be described as "projects" or "activities" because of the ongoing, sustained level of commitment required. Such work includes advocacy for groups who cannot advocate for themselves, such as children and immigrants; coalition building; public education on political, economic, and social issues; and work with grassroots organizations to advance social and environmental causes.

Conclusion

Mainstream service-learning programs are primarily located at the initial stage of critical consciousness. Individuals are immersed in society's hegemonic messages and, as a result, do not question underlying assumptions and biases. Living in segregated communities limits contact with diverse populations; and, with few opportunities to build relationships across racial, ethnic, and class divisions, students receive their information from both overt and covert messages in media and from individuals who surround them. This results in faulty opinions and judgments based on inaccurate and often prejudicial information, which reinforces racism, classism, sexism, and a naive worldview.

High-school and college service programs that are committed to social justice are most often located at the emerging stage. As a result of volunteering at agencies serving people living in poverty and other marginalized populations, individuals at this level begin to think critically about previously held notions of race, class, and gender. Their service work creates spaces for direct interaction with diverse populations, dispelling previously held prejudices and initiating a new understanding of “us” and “them.” Research, accurate information, and class discussion are tools that reinforce moral and civic values, a desire to alleviate suffering, and the development of skills to effect change. Formerly isolated and insulated from reality, students leave their suburban bubble and get out of their comfort zone, gaining new perspectives on others and the world.

Entering into the developing stage of critical consciousness requires a change of minds and hearts at the most fundamental level. Once individuals become aware of how the system awards certain groups of people access to power and the ability to define reality, they undergo a total reordering of what they believe to be true. Growing more aware of power relations, individuals are awakened to the hidden hegemonic messages that form people’s consciousness, political opinions, knowledge of self and others, and worldview, and that manipulate their actions in the interests of the dominant group, rather than in their own interests.

For members of the White middle and upper-middle classes, developing a critical consciousness forces them to acknowledge their White (and, if applicable, male) privilege and reflect on how their actions and attitudes contribute to or work against maintaining the status quo. On a personal level, they need to confront their willingness to give up power, so that others can take a seat at the table.

Humbled in their new awareness, individuals at this level move from knowing the answers to asking questions, from being in charge to being an ally, and from concerns of individual suffering to working for systemic change. Arriving at the developing stage of consciousness is a result of hard work, critical reflection with others striving for integrity, and studying the operations of political and economic systems. Being at this level puts individuals in a difficult, and at times painful, position because once awakened, they cannot return to a simpler, naive existence of not knowing. Well-designed service-learning programs support students as they see possibilities for change and decide to live with integrity and work for social justice.