

the videos. In other cases, you'll access original video content that we produced specifically to accompany this companion book. If you don't already have one, you can download a QR code reader onto your smart phone. The QR code reader app is easy to use, and new users can walk through the app's instructions to learn how to scan the codes in the book.

You'll also notice that we've woven critical questions into each chapter to prompt you to reflect on the ideas and perspectives presented in this book. When you come across these questions, we suggest that you read them and then process your thinking through writing or peer discussion. In fact, it's a great idea to frequently discuss themes and questions from this book, as well as insights about your community-engaged experiences, with classmates, community partners, and your instructor. Our hope is that you enter into your community-engaged learning experience, and this book, with intellectual curiosity, critical consideration, a desire to contribute to the common good of your community, and a commitment to building authentic relationships across differences.

# I IMPERATIVES

## Why We Do Community-Engaged Learning

*All too often we think of community in terms of being with folks like ourselves: the same class, same race, same ethnicity, same social standing and the like. I think we need to be wary: we need to work against the danger of evoking something that we don't challenge ourselves to actually practice.*

—bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

*Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives. And when that person moves away, someone else arises to take his or her place.*

—Parker J. Palmer, "Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing: Ways to Deepen Our Educational Agenda"

*Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.*

—John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*

**A**s you begin your community-engaged learning project, think about the three quotations that serve as epigraphs for this chapter. How do you define *community*? How do these quotations support or challenge you to think differently about community? What surprises you about how they frame your relationship

to the community? Do they make you excited about learning in community? Perhaps a little nervous? Some of both? What opportunities and challenges are evoked?

If you are feeling mixed emotions, you are probably in an appropriate frame of mind to enter a community-engaged learning experience. We believe that, overall, you will find that the opportunities more than balance the challenges and the positive emotions replace any initial concerns. As the hooks quotation implies, you will have opportunities to grow by encountering difference, challenging preconceived notions, bringing your most open mind, and working to understand the experiences, wisdom, and insight of others. hooks reminds us that community engagement requires acknowledging our identity and the identities of those we meet in community. Follow the link in Figure 1.1 and listen to the first 1:10 minutes to hear bell hooks expand on this idea in her own life.

**Figure 1.1.** bell hooks on community.



*Note:* See video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjRSk4hlrtI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjRSk4hlrtI)

Palmer is not speaking about community-engaged learning, but he does foreshadow how community engagement involves work; how community is an ongoing process, not just an unchanging thing; and how learning in community—and potentially encountering difficult differences along the way—is not always easy. Kretzmann and McKnight point out to us why all this work is worthwhile. You have not only the opportunity to be the person using capabilities and giving of your talents but also the chance to benefit from others in the community doing the same and be part of the more powerful community.

Compare that to sitting in a lecture hall, listening to someone run through a PowerPoint presentation for 50 minutes and taking notes silently. Not that you can't learn something in a lecture hall, but you're not going to have the experience described in the

opening quotations. It's why you are lucky to be in a community-engaged learning course. You may not have been thinking of all this when you signed up for such a course. Your instructor has assigned this book, however, because he or she knows that entering into and learning from community require preparation. This book is designed to prepare you for that community-engaged learning, not only so you get the most out of it but also so your community partner also benefits. You will realize that learning from community is a process that requires authenticity—meaning you know yourself, including your strengths and your weaknesses, and are open to learning from and respectful of others—and reciprocity—meaning you are in a relationship where you gain as much as give, learn as much as serve.

As you read this and other chapters, we will present you with information and perspectives that may be new to you. Information is more than just something to know. It is also something that makes us feel. We acknowledge that reading about the inequalities and injustices of the world that serve as imperatives for community engagement can make us angry or sad, activated or resistant. We are whole people—hearts and guts and souls and brains—when we enter community-engaged learning. Your emotions and understanding of self are as important as what you learn about the world around you.

The perspectives that inform this book come from our critical lens for understanding inequality and injustice. These perspectives help us understand why racism and poverty have been persistent, why inequalities have consistently privileged whiteness and wealth, and why charity alone only alleviates symptoms of these problems but never makes them go away. We know that for some of you, this critical perspective already informs how you see the world. For others, it may give you new language to understand concepts that you have always understood at some level. And for others still, this critical lens may be new and challenging. For those encountering and perhaps struggling with these ideas for the first time, we ask you to bring an open mind.

Throughout, we will prompt you with questions, and we hope you will indulge us by grappling with them. The first prompt for reflection asks you to complete this sentence: I do community-engaged learning because . . .

Although we acknowledge that going to school is, in part, about meeting requirements, our hope is that you did not answer this question by saying, “Because I’m required to.” If you are doing community-engaged learning because your college or professor is requiring it, let’s look at why this might be required. Your college may have a community engagement or service-learning requirement because it believes part of its job is preparing students not only for a personally meaningful life and a promising job but also for life in democratic communities. Community engagement and service-learning put you in the middle of working with diverse individuals, groups, and organizations committed to making a difference in the world with integrity and thoughtfulness. This is not just preparation for democratic life, it is actually engaging in it, something educational philosopher John Dewey (1916) reminds us is central to the mission of schools. Your college may require community engagement as a way to carry out its mission for social justice. If that is the case, you will want to think of your work as not only a requirement but also an opportunity to do something that makes the world more equal and just and that provides you with a perspective to make this work a commitment in your life. Perhaps your college or university wants you to develop a sense of belongingness, and community engagement is another way to “belong” to a larger community beyond the one on campus. Community-engaged learning may be a way to engage with people you previously viewed as “outside” your community. In that case, carry a mind-set of openness to meeting and learning from others. Finally, your school may see community engagement as a means to make learning relevant and lasting. The phrase *book learning* is rarely used in a complimentary way, and your community engagement is a chance to go beyond holding abstract and inert knowledge.

Getting beyond “it’s required,” try to revisit your answer to the prompt, “I do community-engaged learning because . . .” What if you were to consider other possible answers to that question? To get you thinking of those possibilities, think about a social, political, or environmental issue that you may have been involved with previously or that you care about. Reflect on how you first encountered the issue. Consider your own motivations, relationships, and other

factors that guided you to get involved or care. What emerged from your involvement with the issue? Think in terms of new learning and relationships. What do you see as some of the takeaways or lessons learned from that occasion to remember as you enter this new community-engaged learning experience? If you haven’t been involved in any issues or even if you have and want to challenge yourself to get involved in new areas, watch a short 1-minute video (Figure 1.2) of students answering why they are doing community-engaged learning. The examples in this video can help you brainstorm issues to which you feel connected.

**Figure 1.2.** Students on the imperatives of community-engaged learning.



*Note.* See video at <https://vimeo.com/236989824/cc3ab44db9>

Notice that these students found reasons outside themselves for why they do community-engaged learning. But unlike the answer “because it’s required,” which is also external, their answers were motivated by a desire to address the problems they describe. These are the imperatives to community-engaged learning.

It’s worth considering more deeply the reasons they mention. Each one is reason alone to take action. Taken together, they make us realize that our planet is at a tipping point of sustainability and our society at a crucial moment in its viability. Clearly we are called to engage, and our education gives us privilege that makes our engagement even more necessary. If you are not convinced yet, consider some of these additional data that call us to action.

### **Underrepresentation of Women and People of Color in Government Leadership and Decision-Making**

We all know the record of women and people of color who have served as president of the United States. We may know less about

the Senate and House of Representatives. Of the 10,000 persons who have served in the House of Representatives since 1789, fewer than 300 have been women. Of the 2,000 who have served in the Senate in that same time period, only 50 have been women. And although things are better now than in 1789, only 21 of the 100 senators in the 115th Congress are women. In the three most recent Congresses, 19% of representatives in the House have been women (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018).

In terms of race and ethnicity, the 115th Congress is the most diverse ever, but it is still more than 80% White. Non-White elected officials include 50 African Americans, 39 Hispanic Americans, 15 Asian Americans, and 2 Native Americans. Twenty (or 34%) of the 59 persons elected to Congress for the first time in 2016 were people of color. By contrast, only 11 (or 15%) of the 71 persons elected for the first time in 2014 were people of color. At the same time, the 106 people of color in the 115th Congress represent only 20% of officials serving in that body. This percentage compares to the 38% of people of color in the United States. Although the percentage of people of color has increased from 12% in the 107th Congress elected in 2000, so has the percentage of people of color, which has grown from 31% at that time, meaning the gap in representation has only grown wider (Bialik & Krogstad, 2017).

Not all important decisions are made in government. We live in a time when public investment in education and social support is shrinking and where markets are valorized as the best way to allocate resources, including labor, financial capital, and natural resources. This system is called *neoliberalism* because it places freedom to make economic decisions, including decisions by corporations, as a paramount concern over other kinds of freedoms, for example, freedom from poverty. Indeed, in the 2010 decision *Citizens United* the Supreme Court ruled that corporations have the right to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections because that spending is a form of free speech protected under the First Amendment. In such a world, the decisions made by corporations have wide-reaching impact and threaten to overwhelm individual and collective public voices.

Who heads these corporations? Among the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, only 21 are women (Zarya, 2016). Only 15 African Americans have ever become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company (Black Chairmen, n.d.). Media businesses reflect similar inequalities. Women hold fewer than 7% of radio and television licenses. People of color hold slightly more than 7% of radio licenses and 3% of television licenses (Free Press, n.d.). At print newspapers, 17% of journalists are people of color, and 38% are women. At online-only news organizations, 23% of journalists are people of color, and 50% are women (American Society of News Editors, 2016). As we've been seeing in the news, the tech industry, which is much vaunted as an engine of economic growth in the United States, employs disproportionate numbers of Whites, Asian Americans, and men (Davidson, 2016).

### Educational Inequity

Disparities in investment in education for children across different racial and economic groups represent what writer Jonathan Kozol (1991) termed *savage inequalities*. Reflecting the resources that their communities can contribute to schools, students in wealthy suburbs of some metropolitan areas like Chicago and New York are likely to receive more than twice as much in additional funding for their education compared to students in city schools. As might be expected, these inequalities in investment result in inequalities in educational outcomes. These are not surprising; indeed, they are predictable. Disparities in school achievement occur in patterns that are recognizable, predictable, and preventable. Currently, 76% of Black students and 79% of Hispanic students graduate on time, compared to 88% of White students and 91% of Asian/Pacific Islander students (Balingit, 2017).

Inequalities start early. Although 19% of preschool students are Black, they account for 47% of preschool expulsions. Preschool expulsions, often driven by implicit racial bias, pathologize normal childhood behavior and force parents to find other preschool options. Inequalities that begin in preschool extend into college and graduate school. Students of color make up only 25% of the

PhDs granted in the United States, and although women have made great strides in higher education, they are still underrepresented in all STEM fields except biology (Matson, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a pernicious aspect of educational inequity. The pipeline refers to the phenomenon of moving students of color and economically poor students out of school and into the juvenile or adult justice system. Zero tolerance policies in schools that push students into the criminal justice system for the smallest infractions contribute to criminalizing what in wealthier schools serving mostly White students would be handled as in-school discipline problems (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018).

The story in Figure 1.3 (an 8-minute audio clip) describes how the school-to-prison pipeline works in the nation's largest public school system.

**Figure 1.3.** School-to-prison pipeline.



Note: Go to [www.wnyc.org/story/blocking-school-prison-pipeline/](http://www.wnyc.org/story/blocking-school-prison-pipeline/) for audio

### Racial Resegregation

Perhaps you are already familiar with the phenomenon of gentrification—the process by which the property values and demographics of a neighborhood change as poor people, artists, people of color, and small independent businesses are forced out of a neighborhood when it becomes popular with wealthier, predominantly White people. Although cities like Brooklyn and San Francisco are well-known examples, this process affects many cities, large and small, throughout the country. You may go to school in a city or town with a “hot” neighborhood full of expensive cafés, galleries, boutiques, and new or renovated apartments. Those developments are considered a sign of gentrification. As a city or neighborhood gentrifies, it becomes

less diverse and, ironically, loses the qualities that made it “hot” in the first place.

Resegregation today looks different from the “White flight” from cities in the second half of the twentieth century. It is slower but no less widespread. As a recent study points out, as neighborhoods change from one racial or ethnic group to another, they will appear integrated for a time but resegregate eventually. Unlike the past, White people do not move out of cities as they did in the White flight of the later twentieth century. Rather, they tend to move into specific city neighborhoods, with the characteristics previously described, resulting in a slower form of urban resegregation that is happening in cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston (Bader & Warkentien, 2016).

Gentrification and segregation are not inevitable. Suburbs today are more integrated than in the last century when covenants in deeds to houses prevented owners from selling to anyone other than Whites and when banks “redlined” neighborhoods, restricting people of color to only certain neighborhoods when they sought a mortgage to buy a house. Today’s integration is fragile (Orfield, 2002), but some cities provide examples of urban development without displacement of poor people, immigrants, and people of color. To learn about a neighborhood in Oakland that is working to develop without gentrification, watch the film in Figure 1.4 (11 minutes), which was created by students as part of a community-engaged learning project.

**Figure 1.4.** Sustaining community without gentrification.



Note: See video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXjjaogtthM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXjjaogtthM)

### Food Insecurity

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2017), 14% of all households are *food insecure*, which is defined as being “uncertain

of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources.” That adds up to more than 48 million people in the United States. Despite social safety nets, food insecurity disproportionately affects children and seniors. Food insecurity is worse in rural areas than in urban areas, an irony considering that many rural families grow or process food (USDA Economic Research Service, 2017). It also affects college students. Four out of 10 University of California students do not have access to nutritious food (Watanabe & Newell, 2016). Wherever poverty exists, food insecurity is a consequence, as illustrated in the film in Figure 1.5 (6:21 minutes).

**Figure 1.5.** Food insecurity.



*Note:* See video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB6rX51ub30](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB6rX51ub30)

In urban areas, *food deserts*, or places without supermarkets where it is difficult to find nutritious and fresh food, contribute to food insecurity as poor families pay more for groceries at corner stores with limited selections of food.

### No Living Wage

A living wage is the amount of money required in a locality to lead a life of dignity. Currently, the federal minimum wage is US\$7.25 an hour, an amount far short of what is considered a living wage in many places. Even when working more than one full-time job at minimum wage, some individuals may still need financial assistance. In some cities and states, the minimum is higher to reflect the higher cost of living. If you are wondering how much it costs to live where you are, use the link in Figure 1.6 to the Living Wage Calculator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. You can check on what constitutes a living wage by locality.

**Figure 1.6.** Calculating a living wage.



*Note:* See calculator at <http://livingwage.mit.edu>

You may very well know what it is like to live on minimum wage. If you do not, the clip in Figure 1.7 (6:40 minutes) will help you understand.

**Figure 1.7.** Living on minimum wage.



*Note:* See video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SCB1t28nDU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SCB1t28nDU) or [www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-UosVZ4gk8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-UosVZ4gk8)

In contrast to the minimum wage, in 2016, your service for community-engaged learning was valued on average at more than US\$24 per hour by Independent Sector (2016), an organization that calculates what volunteers contribute to their local communities across the United States. Discrepancies between living wages and real wages raise questions about the value of labor and whether wages reflect that value. For example, as a society, we believe young people are our future, yet early childhood educators working with those young people are poorly paid.

### State Brutality Against People of Color

Few injustices have led to more recent activism by young people across the country than the killing of unarmed Black men by police. Such examples include the following:

- Eric Garner; New York City; July 17, 2014
- Michael Brown; Ferguson, Missouri; August 9, 2014
- Tamir Rice; Cleveland, Ohio; November 22, 2014
- Walter Scott; North Charleston, South Carolina; April 4, 2015
- Freddie Gray; Baltimore, Maryland; April 19, 2015
- Alton Sterling; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; July 5, 2016
- Philando Castile; Falcon Heights, Minnesota; July 6, 2016
- Stephon Clark; Sacramento, California; March 18, 2018

These names are part of a long historical injustice of using state power to maintain White supremacy. Their deaths spawned several movements, including Black Lives Matter. Although each of these deaths has caused much pain, loss, and anger, the last three, posted on social media, sparked particular outrage, reminding the nation of the danger that Black and brown people face in their own communities at the hands of law enforcement. We know police work is difficult and honorable. We also know that racial bias influences police officers' decisions on the job (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007). Seeing these shootings online raises questions about what we do at the local level to prevent such brutality. What do our beliefs about moral justice compel us to do as a nation?

### Losing Wildlife Faster Than Ever

Currently, more than 13,000 species are listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2017). The World Wildlife Fund (2016) estimates that the number of wild animals on the planet has been cut by more than half in the last 40 years. The main reasons for this loss include human exploitation, habitat change and loss, and climate change. In 2016, the planet saw its first extinction tied to global warming: the Bramble Cay melomys, a rodent that lived on a tiny outcrop of Australia's Great Barrier Reef and was wiped out by rising tides (Innis, 2016). In the future, one in six species could face extinction from climate change (Urban, 2015).

### Stigma of Mental Illness

Mental illness is treatable, and having a mental illness does not need to prevent anyone from participating meaningfully in life. However, because of biases in society and the lack of comprehensive services, persons with mental illnesses face more than only medical problems. They must deal with accessing health care in a nation where it is not always readily available or culturally appropriate, meaning it meets not only medical needs but also the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of patients. They also face discrimination in employment and housing that can lead to a host of other problems, including unemployment and homelessness. More than 124,000—or one-fifth—of the 610,000 homeless people across the United States suffer from mental illnesses like schizophrenia, depression, or bipolar disorder according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, as reported by *USA Today* (Jervis, 2014). Living on the streets with a mental illness poses all kinds of threats, the most serious being death from causes ranging from violence to exposure. This is the result of the stigma of mental illness.

As authors of this book, we struggle with sharing these statistics and portraits of social and environmental ills with you. We know that for some, these data could be overwhelming. For others, we worry that these data could reinforce stereotypes about people and the individual causes of poverty. We hope, however, that they inspire you to look further into issues that call you to action and provide a context for making sense of your community-engaged learning. That context is one of social structural factors that shape inequality and injustice in our world. We know that individuals make choices and some of those result in personal hardship. We also know that people operate in larger social, political, and economic systems. Those systems do not affect everyone equally, as you can see. Not everyone has to make decisions about buying food versus paying for health care. Not everyone questions if she will be taken seriously as a candidate for elected office because of her gender. Not everyone worries in the same way about being pulled over by a police officer. These differences affecting people unequally shape what kinds of choices some of us make.

Sometimes these larger social systems causing such injustice are called *structural inequality*, meaning the inequality results from a stacked deck presenting limited options among bad choices that some people, often because of race and class, are forced to make. Consider homelessness. The sociologist Matthew Desmond (2016) has documented how economic and legal systems are structured in such a way that some people, especially poor, single women of color, are constantly forced to deal with housing insecurity and make choices that work against moving to more stable housing situations.

Many of the issues described in this chapter intersect. For example, educational inequities intersect with neighborhood segregation, which both connect to unequal political and economic representation. Seeing these intersections allows us to understand the complexities of seeking social change. Although we may work on one particular issue, our efforts can have impact beyond that. What we want you to understand from this is that in your community-engaged work, you may be helping individuals dealing with injustice, but do not lose sight of the systems in the larger world that are causing injustice. Realize that your work in the community matters not only for your education but also the lives of others.

Like the students in the video, think about the issues that matter to you. How can you engage one of those issues in particular? How can you take the information about inequality and injustice presented so far and use it to understand your community-engaged work? Can you frame your work in the community positively? In other words, can you think less in terms of what the scholar Eve Tuck (2009) calls *damage-centered work* and more in terms of *desire-centered work*? Often motivated by a sense of social justice and seeking change, damage-centered work is focused on what is not working and what is wrong in the lives of individuals and communities. It can inadvertently reinforce notions of people and communities as broken. By contrast, desire-centered work focuses on the vision and wisdom in people and communities. It provides possibilities for action based on what might be or what once was. If you focus on an issue in a damage-centered way, you run the risk of looking at people only as suffering from that problem, not as complex, nuanced individuals dealing with a problem but also so much more. You may

have thought only in terms of solving one person's problem rather than thinking about how a community of people would make a larger change. Consider how your community-engaged work can draw on collective vision and build something, not merely ameliorate part of a problem.

The last person in the first video clip you watched says she is afraid of becoming desensitized. How did you react to thinking about these issues after reading the statistics in this chapter? Desensitized? Overwhelmed? Helpless? Aware? Motivated? Capable? Our hope is that you do not become desensitized. We understand that becoming used to injustice can mean doing less to change it. Our media are full of people who, because they are aware, motivated, and capable, are not desensitized, who take action for change. We hope that by being present, authentic, and reflective, you continue to feel mobilized rather than desensitized.

Think of Alicia Garza, who was angered at the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old Black young man, and at the 2013 acquittal of the man accused of killing him. Garza wrote a post on Facebook saying that “black lives matter” (Gynn, 2015). As special projects director at the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Garza understood the importance of organizing. Her friend Patrice Cullors understood the power of the Internet and created the hashtag from Garza's words. Opal Tometi built the online platform. Together they started a movement challenging racism that has resonated across college campuses as well as communities throughout the United States (Garza, 2014).

Think of pediatrician Mona Hanna-Attisha, who began testing for environmental toxins when she learned that Flint, Michigan, was not doing anything to check levels of lead in drinking water after switching its water source from Lake Huron to the polluted Flint River. Her data showed that lead was contaminating the city's water. Despite denials from city and state officials, she pressed forward until government agencies confirmed her findings and took responsibility (Erb, 2015).

Garza and Hanna-Attisha did not succumb to desensitization. Instead they felt that injustice called them to work with others to make change. As we are writing this book, young activists are



protesting revocation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) for approximately 800,000 people who came to the United States before they were 16 years old. Revoking DACA would mean these young people could be deported. Here again, young people are responding with action to injustice. Young people are also protesting gun violence in schools and communities. This chapter takes its title, “Imperatives,” because what it describes are urgent, important issues that move people to action. Look for the imperatives that move you in your community-engaged learning and can help set a course for your life using your education for the common good.

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## 2

### BENEFITS

#### What We Gain From Community-Engaged Learning

**B**eyond the reasons for community engagement that are about making a difference in the world, there are also reasons that are personal, that are about what you gain. What do you hope to gain from your community-engaged learning? If you said a good grade, perhaps you were being cynical. But if we reframe getting a good grade, we can also think of it as one way of acknowledging that when our work really matters, we are called to do our best. So, of course, you should get a good grade. But more important, you should want to do your best work because the community you are working with deserves no less.

Watch the short video in Figure 2.1 (1:26 minutes) to learn about some of the personal benefits from community-engaged learning.

**Figure 2.1.** Students on the imperatives of community-engaged learning.



*Note:* See video at <https://vimeo.com/236989704/cae21aac7>

The Student Companion to

# COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW  
FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING  
AND REAL SOCIAL CHANGE



David M. Donahue and Star Plaxton-Moore

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