
Service-Learning in Design and Planning

Education at the Boundaries

EDITORS

*Tom Angotti, Cheryl Doble,
and Paula Horrigan*

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Years later, reflecting on the Shared Prosperity studio, one student remarked on its intensity: “the project became emotional at times when [we experienced] the passions of the community” (quoted in Nalencz 2006). The presence of the emotions of others—pride, shame, ambition, imagination, stemming from an attachment to their place in the world—was the uncontrolled and vital force that penetrated the opacity of studio practice as usual. Our normative methods of representation and research, our presumptions about the purposes and products of design, and our unseemly role as expert consultants were unmasked as inadequate means for engaging a place. In the presence of emotion, the community also set aside its mantle of resistance to being examined—perhaps judged—by an exogenous elite.

The exchange of alternative imaginations had begun to form a porous membrane for creativity. Bubbling out of the swamps and bogs of North Philadelphia, precious, significant, deeply felt neighborhood problems too long hidden from public view struggled to the surface; sites of creative interest, too nuanced or mundane to be recognized without their local narratives, were revealed, and the aspirations for an empowered community began to emerge and take shape through design.

In reality, creation is a disseminated proliferation.

CHAPTER 2

Reconsidering the Margin

Relationships of Difference and Transformative Education

Jodi Rios

Architecture’s primary task is to create a paradise on earth. —*Alvar Aalto*

The end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community. —*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Over the past forty years, community engagement has become a stated objective of many institutions of higher learning in the United States. The scope, definition, and outcome of such engagement, however, can be as varied as the disciplines themselves and are always shaped by the individuals who spearhead this work. In an effort to evaluate engagement between the academy and the community and seek to recognize pedagogical frameworks that support positive outcomes on both sides, it becomes important to reflect on how transformative and reciprocal relationships are defined and fostered. If traditional service-learning models are to be challenged, and I argue that they should, then it is necessary to ask the most basic questions: Who is served? and What is learning?

This chapter considers these questions in the context of architectural education. It also reflects upon the experiences that have impacted my teaching and the curricula that I have developed over a decade. This experience has been shaped by the disparity between the largely privileged students at the private university where I have taught and the marginalized African American communities where I have spent much time. I have also been influenced by my colleague, Bob Hansman, who embarked on this journey ahead of me and whose mentorship and support encourages me to keep pursuing the more difficult path.

What I hope to communicate in this essay is that meaningful and transformative engagement is always messy, often unpredictable, and dependent on sustained human relationships. When true *relationship* is achieved, it is inherently transformative because one cannot remain indifferent to those with whom one is intertwined. This level of engagement changes outcomes in addition to transforming individuals, as the grounds for assessment and decision making must reflect the values and priorities of both parties—and learning will occur in multiple directions.

I will first establish the context for how I found myself in community-based teaching and the initial failures that prompted me to question what it means to engage students with a community in a meaningful way. I then outline a theoretical framework for why engaged pedagogy is important to academia and design by discussing viewpoints that have informed my own theoretical assertions. Finally, I summarize the concepts of transformative education that have influenced my pedagogical approach to community-based teaching and describe the courses that have resulted from them.

The Context

Architecture has an implicit role to examine and question what it means to build in the urban context and how interventions may challenge, transform, or reinforce meaning, identity, and power embedded within a particular place. Upon joining the architecture faculty at Washington University in St. Louis in 1996, I was struck by the number of design studios that were using areas defined by disinvestment and vacancy in the city as sites for student projects. These sites were presented to students as the equivalent of a blank slate with a few potential *remnants* from which design explorations could emerge. Even as I embraced theoretical inquiry and creative intent within design, the blatant dismissal of the people who lived in these areas and the attitude that “anything is better than what is there” was disconcerting because it reinforced the fact that design reproduces power: for whom will it be “better,” and by what set of criteria is “better” defined? While architecture alone is incapable of solving social inequities, I reject the argument that architecture is a benign, apolitical practice that lacks social responsibility or political agency, or that an architect’s responsibility is solely to the client. Architecture and urban design certainly operate within structures of power.¹

Setting out to take a different approach to the urban studio, I chose the same sites of perceived disinvestment and decay but hoped to bring a different perspective from the one I describe above. I demanded that my students

spend significant time in the area and meet routinely with different groups of residents. In spite of this effort, the students were quickly overwhelmed by the contrast between the neighborhood and their own experiences and could not go much beyond their personal perceptions, fears, and stereotypes. Good intentions did not suffice, and the students found it difficult to see any significant value or meaning in the neighborhood because they held up the comparative lens of middle-class values and expectations. Concurrent to this viewpoint was the adherence to a disciplinary elitism that fetishizes form and valorizes the artist/architect as creative genius. The students were anxious to show the residents what their neighborhood *could be* if only they embraced the values, expertise, and insight that the students had to offer. Communication between the students and the residents remained polite; however, suspicion and disregard was clearly evident from both sides.

For their part, the residents were distanced, somewhat suspicious, and unwilling to confront the students. While they desired to see change in their community and initially welcomed student input and ideas, subsequent interviews revealed that they resented the implication that the outsiders knew what was good for their neighborhood and that terms like *at risk*, *marginalized*, and *underprivileged* were used to describe the area. The residents reported that their critique was dismissed as simplistic and nostalgic. They did not, however, confront the students because they stated that they were familiar with these attitudes and did not believe that the students were capable of change; it was simply not worth their time or energy to take the encounters past a superficial and gratuitous level. Ultimately, the residents politely accepted what the students proposed, which was a butterfly garden with shelter and seating, but they did not find much value in the students’ vision, nor were they invested in it. It has since fallen into disrepair.

The level of respect and understanding on both sides did not occur as I had hoped, and I learned that spending time in a community and talking with people does not guarantee understanding, nor does it ensure a design response that engenders the values of a community or ownership of it. In retrospect, this should have been obvious and I was guilty of the same naïve idealism and judgment that my students had brought with them. It led me to question whether it is possible to teach design which aspires to the highest standards of excellence while responding to the specificities, strengths, and complex identities of a place quite different from that of the designer. How does meaningful engagement occur that leads to something beyond that which could otherwise have been conceived—a profound creativity that is dependent on the conflict and the interaction itself?

Conceptualizing a Pedagogy of Engagement

Over the past four decades there have been many advocating for democratic and inclusive design processes that emphasize community building, and consistent calls for an end to the residual structures of a post-colonial society and paternalistic altruism. Unfortunately the scenario that I just described and the “blank slate” approach are still too often the methods used in both education and practice when professionals bring services to communities for whom they have little respect. Even when there is a sincere desire to help communities considered less fortunate—using words such as *empowerment* and *development*—the neoliberal elitism that can result often reinforces dominant structures through subversive means. Paulo Freire observed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that as those attached to the dominant culture attempt to shed oppression and move to the side of the oppressed, previous prejudices and judgments will subconsciously emerge in the form of knowledge and control. Even in their attempts to subjugate the power structure, the privileged lack confidence in those they are trying to empower and dominate the effort to disrupt an unjust order (Freire 1970). This is the irony and the danger of dominant classes seeking to elevate marginalized classes without first shifting their own position; the ethicist can become the imperialist. Author bell hooks speaks of the tendency of dominant culture to usurp the narrative of the oppressed:

Often this speech about the “Other” annihilates, erases: “No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own.”
(hooks 1990, 151)

The students tried to understand the community on their own terms and they did not trust the community to know what was good. The community was thus framed through a limited lens of *difference* and the students’ need to define difference relative to what they perceived to be a normative perspective, both socially and architecturally. They therefore took ownership of both defining and solving the communities’ problems, even though there was a *listening* component embedded in the class.

Fincher and Iveson (2008) discuss such observations, noting the post-critical² assumption held by many enlightened academics such as my students—that they had overcome closed-mindedness and that the academic realm itself was outside of any structural oppression that might be in play.

Rather than considering how their own background might influence not only their response to the community but also their own reflexive capacity, the students maintained that they had been conditioned not to see race or class and could therefore achieve an objective viewpoint. Because a seemingly inclusive and communicative process was used, all potential for exclusion was ruled out, thereby neutralizing any criticism of the outcome and denying any responsibility for unintended consequences since good intentions were always assumed and not questioned. This assumption led to the corollary that if the process was inclusive, the product must be inclusive as well. Initial student discussions had consistently centered on what the students perceived to be alarming destitution. Fincher and Iveson (2008) again point out that discourses regarding design that focus on the disadvantage of people and presume that a community lacks an acceptable future without intervention result in further stigmatization and subsequent decline. Indeed, the students found it difficult to speak positively about what they saw, which resulted in further alienation from the community.

As I reflected on this experience and considered how the outcome might have been different, I looked again to bell hooks’ writings on cultural theory and transformational pedagogy, particularly her concept regarding a marginal space of resistance brought about by what she calls “radical openness” (hooks 1990). This idea seemed to me the only way to describe what needed to happen in order for there to be any hope of bringing dissimilar people together in a meaningful way, or of envisioning Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s concept of the “beloved community.” What does it look like to be the beloved community that King imagined? Based on King’s words, the beloved community is the aftermath of nonviolence that makes the struggle and resistance truly meaningful and transformative (1960). It is a new relationship between oppressed and oppressor based on reconciliation, redemption, and a love and hope that can transform oppressors into friends (King 1957). According to King, love is inseparable from justice and it is the basis for evaluating that which is transformed and that which is merely cloaked in rhetoric. “Therefore the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word” (King 1967, 191). According to King, the beloved community is both the location and the goal of transformative struggle and any hope of creating and entering such a community requires love (Marsh 2005). Love as affect and its role in the practice of relationships has also been discussed throughout philosophical discourse, including the work of Deleuze (1994), Spinoza (1996), Levinas (2006), and Irigaray (2008). More recently, affects such as love and hope relative to the urban condition are explored and valorized in the work of nonrepresentational theorists such as Thrift.

The *margin* is the location of intimacy and perhaps another location of the beloved community and transformative struggle. This requires a different way of thinking about the meeting of disparate groups. Rather than speaking about *bridging gaps* or *erasing boundaries* between defined groups, let us consider a space in which the centrality of all actors is given up or denied—denied by the individuals themselves. All become “other” in the marginal space, which thus erases “the Other” and displaces the subject/object paradigm. This is not the same as the universalistic notion of synthesizing difference into a unified whole because individual identity is understood and indeed necessary to this kind of engagement. Choosing the margin, as bell hooks points out, is much different from being placed in the margin.

While hooks theorizes choosing the margin from the perspective of the marginalized, I would argue that choosing the margin can occur from the direction of the dominant culture as well, although the reasons for and experience of such a choice will be different. Choosing the margin involves struggle regardless of the departure point—any time one acts outside of the norm, some level of resistance will occur. From the standpoint of the marginalized, it is an act of choosing to stay in the margin whereas from the position of dominant culture it is an act of entering the margin. Those who already occupy that margin must be willing to embrace such an entry. From that perspective, power is shifted to the marginalized. This raises the philosophical question, must one be powerless to occupy the margin? Author bell hooks elaborates on this concept:

Marginality is much more than a site of deprivation . . . it is also the site of radical possibility . . . it is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such [it is not] a marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center—but rather a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative new worlds. (hooks 1990: 149)

The marginal space of resistance is a space of creativity that resists normative assumptions about the way things are. It is not just a space for the oppressed. As I saw the ensnarement of dominant culture in my own life, I realized that hooks was speaking to all of us. This *positive* marginal space is a space of resistance for both oppressed and oppressor, regardless of how enlightened one views oneself. It is intentionally chosen and entered from any cultural perspective—a third possibility which requires all sides to shift and does not exist otherwise. This marginal space of resistance differs from recognition models³ in that it requires relational participation and acknowl-

edges each group’s need for the other in a truly reciprocal manner. From this standpoint, it is not enough that the marginalized are recognized; what must occur is the recognition that those occupying the center are in need of those at the margin to be, themselves, liberated from walls and boundaries—resulting in a form of mutual care. Discovering oneself to be an oppressor can result in much remorse, but such realization does not always lead to solidarity. More often, a paternalism that holds the marginalized in positions of dependence will result. Only entering into the situation of the marginal will produce freedom on all sides (Freire 1970).

Regardless of how we frame or reframe our understanding of transformative openness and its potential, a radical position is required that takes us outside of clearly defined jurisdictions of practice and into the places of honest relationship with those who expose our own need. It is a dangerous position. The binary of Whiteness/Otherness has maintained the privileges that the middle class in the United States have come to expect (Lipsitz 1998). To assume the radical position is to risk jeopardizing our expectations and finding ourselves in potentially uncomfortable situations. From an academic standpoint, this position destabilizes long-accepted methodologies and traditional modes for the production of knowledge rooted in the social sciences. The *study* of culture, race, and class has neatly packaged theoretical premises for larger disciplinary consumption—leading to convenient conclusions that do little more than valorize discursive formations within the academic realm (Kelley 1997). The choice to pursue the radical position certainly implies consequences.

Teaching a Pedagogy of Engagement through Relationship

It has been fourteen years since my first attempt to bring students together with communities. In that time I have developed a critical pedagogy intended to encourage opportunities for marginal spaces of engagement and to expand the critical consciousness of my students and the communities with whom they interact. This has meant squarely addressing issues of racial reconciliation and challenging many aspects of dominant culture, including those within architecture and urban theory. These things are not peripheral to the practice of architecture, nor do their considerations devalue other facets of design exploration and process. Rather, if architecture reflects and reproduces the nature and values of a society, then it should grapple with what that society is and ask questions regarding what it should be. More than ever, it is important to understand that the decisions we make have consequences. They are not benign, and how we make them certainly reveals

how we view the world. Author bell hooks states: “Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” “The appropriation and use of space are political acts.” (hooks 1990, 152). Architecture and the design disciplines indeed have agency and have a critical role to play in moving toward a just society.

In higher education the stakes of pedagogical choices cannot be calculated in the narrow range of best practices or design thinking or even critical thinking, but only on a complete terrain that encompasses the broader implications of what learning might be. By developing curricula that raise questions regarding personal and professional accountability for the status quo within the context of a broader social and cultural encounter, I am utilizing my position as a professor to challenge my students to become designers who understand the agency that they possess. Furthermore, if attitudes and tangible life decisions are going to be transformed, as I suggest must happen in order to de-stratify our society, then it must occur within higher education and certainly within our most elite institutions.

Noah De Lissovoy (2008) accurately writes about the problems that arise when attempting to reframe difference through the educational process for the purpose of transformation. He offers three principles that support a transformative pedagogy that I have found useful toward linking theory with teaching and in articulating the purpose of taking a transformative approach to education. Although De Lissovoy specifically addresses the classroom setting, his pedagogy of difference argues for something not unlike hooks’ radical openness and is useful for furthering a critical pedagogy for academic/community engagement. I have adapted these three principles for this purpose.

First, if assimilation racism erases cultural identity and fails to value difference, then to embrace minority culture and value its communities will inherently challenge the dominant culture and attitudes that deem them deficient, thus achieving a transformative pedagogy (De Lissovoy 2008). This is a simple idea that is difficult to implement among politically correct students who will deny difference at every turn in an effort to not offend or feel uncomfortable. I have found that to overcome politically correct silence, it is effective to ask students to consider the ways that erasure of cultural identity and failure to acknowledge difference oppress rather than equalize. There is a difficult balance to strike between the transformative potential of opening oneself up to different ways of understanding the world and the tendency to essentialize difference in order to define, describe, and ultimately consume it. By looking at specific examples of how power struc-

tures are reproduced within the built environment, effectively neutralizing difference, and how consumer culture will essentialize and co-opt difference when difference cannot be denied, helps students to realize that design and the built environment is far from benign.

Second, since dominated voices themselves reflect hegemonic values, all voices need to be interrogated as well as affirmed. Critical reflection and transformative pedagogy assume a complex conversation in which affirmation and interrogation are not opposed but are complimentary to the process of liberating the assumptions of different people groups. When it is possible to get students to accept the first principal—to openly speak about and listen to previously marginalized voices—they often complain that this second principal contradicts the first. It is useful to point out that sociological studies have consistently shown that when marginalized populations in the US are asked if the poor have themselves to blame for their condition, they answer yes, even if they cite other reasons for their own individual situation (Wilson 2009). Thus, minority groups often perpetuate the dominant narrative.

Third, developing a pedagogy that seeks to *hear* all of the voices at the table regardless of viewpoint will reveal that many discourses that proclaim openness within the academic realm end up excluding voices that do not fulfill the accepted narrative, resulting in a paradoxical closure of ideas. Students generally view themselves as independent and enlightened thinkers and they are quite surprised to find that they have participated in the silencing of voices or have, themselves, been silenced. This is generally when a conscious shift occurs and they choose to recognize and resist both a conferred social construct and an assumed academic objectivity. Students begin to practice the freedom of speaking honestly and challenge one another without the fear of judgment.

These three principles are critical to a pedagogy of difference and establish the means by which to also bring about a crisis of thinking in which the subject position of the individual, regardless of location, is inescapably problematized and requires a choice: one must make a choice to adjust their locational position or affirm it; ignorance is no longer an option. This crisis of thinking has become foundational to my teaching and provides the metric for evaluating that which I am doing.

Developing a Framework over Time

One semester is not sufficient to initiate a crisis of thinking, to engage with a community in a meaningful way, and to carry out a design project. At least two, if not more, semesters are required. Overcoming curricular

requirements and structures in order to carry out a two- or three-semester sequence poses many logistical obstacles. I began by establishing relationships between courses, and as I gradually developed a strong pedagogical basis for the time and momentum needed to do this work, I was able to implement a formal engagement curriculum with the help of a sympathetic dean. I was emphatic that a minimum three-year commitment by the university to a community was essential if trust and reciprocity were to be achieved. Bruce Lindsey, who has a notable background in community engagement in his own right, was willing to make such a commitment, and we began to implement such a sequence at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts.

The *Reconsidering the Margin* seminar is the first course in the sequence and is an introduction and immersion class intended to problematize prior assumptions and begin to establish relationships within a community. Students are required to get to know individuals from the neighborhood with which they are working, and frameworks are put in place that facilitate such relationships, such as helping seniors in their home and volunteering in an after-school program. Throughout the semester, students are pushed to openly interrogate their own ideas relative to those around them, which include both their peers and the communities. The concept of reconciliation and what that actually means is an underlying theme to the semester, and students are asked to consider the impact of relationships on their understanding of the community throughout the semester by means of reflection and the act of making.

Reflection is a critical component of this type of learning because it helps students connect individual observations with larger aspects of the world around them. Because architecture is a visual discipline, the course requires a weekly visual reflection, usually a form of mapping, which documents their transforming perspective of the neighborhood. Each student develops a methodology for documentation that they then carry through the semester. I have found visual reflection to be very effective on multiple levels. The many decisions that must be made by the students regarding what they are communicating, how they will represent it, the act of making, and the resulting interpretations all inform both the individual and the group, and prompt provocative discussions. Students also present their reflections to the class, ensuring that each student has a voice that is recognized. Sometimes the *voice* is made known through the viewing of the artifact itself, but is heard nonetheless. Often the quietest student will produce the loudest representation and is, therefore, able to express emotion that would otherwise go unnoticed. Such recognition goes a long way in creating a community of learning within the classroom, which is entirely

different from relying on discussion alone. Author bell hooks, when referring to Freire's work, speaks of this community:

Rather than focusing on issues of safety, I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn—to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world. (hooks 1994, 40)

The seminar makes every effort to force discussions about, rather than step around, the two topics that students have been groomed to avoid—race and class. In order to create an environment of open dialogue, I have found that it is essential to expose weaknesses and struggles in my own thinking to my students if I am going to ask them to enter into risky dialogue and reflection and thus expose potential “problems” in their thinking. I must be willing to initiate a self-critical examination of personal attitudes and decisions in the context of the class discussion. This kind of humility in the classroom is antithetical to the typical teacher/student dynamic, but it is critical to creating a space of personal engagement, both in the classroom and in the community. Developing a tolerance for opinions other than my own and not attempting to immediately dispel what I might consider “problems of thinking” is also critical to this kind of teaching.

Residents often find the students' desire to discuss issues of race and class surprising and initially suspicious; however, discussions that would be impossible to have between relative strangers begin to occur when foundational friendships precede them. While they are not neighbors, the rapport between student and resident often goes beyond that of mere recognition in that long-term personal bonds are established that sometimes include integration into social networks. The fact that I have established many of my own relationships within the community goes a long way in encouraging residents to enter into difficult conversations with students. Because a commitment has been made to their community and they are co-participants, they understand theirs is a role of power as opposed to being a subject of study.

The outcome of the course differs from semester to semester and is determined by the degree to which relationships are formed. Students are asked to produce a collaborative representation that attempts to document the process of the reflection throughout the semester. Many students have reported later that they have maintained relationships in the community and have continued to spend time there in some capacity. In two cases, students later moved to the neighborhoods where they initially worked. In terms of an introductory course, it has proven extremely useful to subsequent courses

that work with these neighborhoods as the students have already developed an appreciation and have begun to think more critically regarding their own participation in what they have found.

The second class, the Urban Issues and Development course, is an interdisciplinary, community-based class co-taught with faculty from law, social work, public policy, and business. This graduate-level course solicits Requests for Proposals (RFP's) from neighborhood groups, nonprofits, or government agencies that desire assistance with development projects in under-resourced neighborhoods. Several RFP's are selected by the faculty, one of which always includes a project from the area with which the *Reconsidering the Margin* seminar has worked. Students are placed on an interdisciplinary team that then responds to the individual RFP with a comprehensive development proposal.

Ideally, many of the architecture students who take the Urban Issues and Development course have taken the *Reconsidering the Margin* seminar; it is hoped that the critical thinking skills and intimate knowledge acquired in the seminar regarding these neighborhoods will influence the interdisciplinary teams. Many of the students who have not taken the previous seminar, especially those in law and business, sign up thinking that they will simply learn how to make money developing underdeveloped areas. Because the class is not simply "preaching to the choir," discussions frequently elicit vocal and angry responses. Students often ask questions such as, "Where are you trying to steer us, anyway?" which is the same question that Freire observed when working with professionals. Freire states, "The participants begin to realize that if their analysis of the situation goes any deeper they will either have to divest themselves of their myths, or reaffirm them" (Freire 1970, 156).

Although sometimes hostile, I welcome these discussions and it is quite rewarding if, after engaging and problem solving with the community, these students are willing to consider differing viewpoints, even if they do not embrace them. Maintaining an acceptance among students for differing viewpoints and moderating discussion is the primary focus of classroom interaction, and it is always challenging to remain objective. Often, discussions between other faculty members and myself serve as a model for how to debate widely differing ideas while maintaining respect. Like the *Reconsidering the Margin* seminar, the course utilizes texts from a range of disciplines intended to provide a framework for dialogue,⁴ and students are asked to write reflection papers prior to classroom discussion that take a position with regard to the reading. It has been interesting to note that students from different disciplines consistently react to and approach urban problems in very different ways. The reflection papers tend to be broken

down along disciplinary lines, which raises the question: Do students with particular belief systems gravitate toward certain disciplines or does each discipline produce such systems of thought? Likely it is both. This supports the argument for transdisciplinarity, which maintains that complex problems are best addressed from multiple points of view—regardless of where they are formed and provided that each informs the other.

It is difficult to recreate the relational aspect of the initial seminar in the interdisciplinary course, which is why it is essential to include students from the earlier seminar in the second course. The relationships built with the community during the first seminar often prove to be the guiding influences for the team responses, as a level of trust has been established between members of the team and members of the community. This trust facilitates a more sincere dialogue and leads to a response that reflects the actual, rather than perceived, desires of the community. The benefit of including team members who truly value the neighborhood and no longer fear it goes without saying. The transformative nature of the trust relationships, developed in the seminar through time and intimacy, provides a better context for reciprocity to emerge because community members understand that theirs is a role of teaching and challenging the students in addition to receiving student input. Service, like learning, occurs from both directions.

Even in the best of circumstances, the possibility for conflict, misunderstanding, and other hindrances always exists and should be understood as part of the learning process. It is important that expectations—those of students, faculty, administration, clients, and community—are realistic and recognize the fluid nature of the process. If problems that arise along the way are seen as obstacles rather than opportunities for learning, then disillusionment will quickly set in. Organizations may be disorganized, residents may not agree, political power and jurisdictional struggles may be in play, project goals may change mid-course, student group dynamics may break down. Any of these scenarios can stifle what is ultimately produced; however, they force the question, *What is learning?* and represent the reality and fragility of the project and of human relationships. They should not be understood as failures to be avoided.

The fact that development interests do not always coincide with resident interests becomes an important issue for many of the projects. For example, we have had instances where students working on an RFP have rejected the policy initiatives proposed by their client because they were deemed unjust and discriminatory. In these cases, the client is not always happy with the outcome of the proposal; however, the students have learned about the issues facing the community and have decided to use their proposal to illuminate

and challenge unjust practices. One such example involved a municipality (client) that was using records of trash service and mortgage payment delinquency to target property that it wished to acquire for development. The municipality had taken legal action toward back taxes on these parcels but had not taken action on properties with similar delinquency in more affluent areas. The students were able to shine light on this practice, thus informing residents of their rights, and the municipality backed off. In other cases, in response to overwhelming resident concern, student proposals have supported the use of targeting tax delinquency and code noncompliance for the purpose of ridding blocks of specific drug and crime activity, which illustrates the complexity of ethics and questions with which the students must grapple. Therefore, we do not always base success of the proposal on the satisfaction of the client, but rather on the comprehensive nature of the student response and full consideration of the question, *What is service?* in the context of what they have been asked to do.

The third course in the sequence is a design/build studio. Students from prior semesters are encouraged to sign up and it is hoped that previously established trust relationships with the community are further developed and nurtured. The design problem that was identified in the prior semester is addressed and student teams quickly develop different design solutions, one of which is selected by the community. As an example, one Spring semester the *Reconsidering the Margin* class discovered that a grassroots art program was taking place every summer on the blacktop of a local playground, which attracted over forty children from the community who attended in spite of lack of shade and temperatures over ninety degrees. The design problem that was defined with the community ended up being a shade and performance pavilion for the art program that was later designed and built by the subsequent Fall design/build studio. During the summer between semesters, two student interns were hired for the purpose of maintaining communication with residents and laying the logistical groundwork for the design/build project, such as coordinating site work and confirming funding sources.

The designs developed for the design/build projects are rigorous and prove that residents can visualize and embrace sophisticated conceptual ideas. Several events are planned during the design development stage, all of which have a component focused on the youth in the area. Usually this component consists of drawing and model-making activities, and, in some cases, we have utilized a photo-voice element in which children document important aspects of their environment. I have found that the creative capacity of the children and their openness to working with students is the most effective way of ultimately engaging the adult residents who are eventually drawn

in by the children's enthusiasm. Working with the children also allows for alternative design processes to be employed by the students and can often challenge traditional modes of design thinking and problem solving. During the last nine weeks of the semester, the students spend four to seven days a week at a physical site in the community building the project. This aspect of "just being there" (Hansman 2009) leads to a certain degree of ownership on their part and certainly provides many opportunities for getting to know residents.

Tangential to the courses described above but essential to the pedagogy is the synthesis of teaching and research efforts within this academic realm. Linking the efforts of the classes with funded research is important in order to assist these communities with identifying inequities, targeting resources, fostering citizenship, and gaining the attention of policy makers. Recently, my research entailed a Health Impact Assessment funded in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that focused on a proposed development project in the community in which my students had been working. This interdisciplinary research project required extensive community engagement that would not have been successful had the relationships and trust not been previously established with both residents and leadership. Integrating funded research also provides the means to employ students over the summer to bridge the gap between the Spring and Fall semesters and sustain the momentum. Hiring students involved with the classes during the academic year to work on research projects taking place in the same areas with which they have worked further links curricular objectives and leverages the knowledge built in the classroom.

Practicing a Pedagogy of Engagement

I know now that I cannot introduce service or design projects to students until they recognize the filters through which they see, understanding that they are in need of the people whom they wish to serve. In the same way, it is necessary for communities to recognize the possibility for attitudes to change and to value the necessity of their own role in that transformation. Author bell hooks reinforces this sentiment when she states that "people of color who truly believe that white people cannot change can only embrace the logic of victimhood [and] anyone who denies that this change *can* happen, is acting in collusion with the existing forces of racial domination" (2003, 53–55). Communities that do not feel that such change has meaning to them will feel used when students enter their neighborhoods; those that do will feel a sense of power. If students seek to serve without understanding the

truth of their own accountability and do not embrace what they find, their work will be an exercise of domination. If the residents of these communities see only the truth of a dominant culture, and do not open themselves to relationship and accountability in building bonds of trust through dialogue, then we are left with a false hope.

Transforming people and communities is relevant to architecture and the design disciplines, and design education has a responsibility to make this relevance evident. The design professions are fundamentally human endeavors situated as practices between power and need. The built environment produces and reproduces the values, opportunities, and constraints of a society and, therefore, the designer is either active or complacent in recognizing his or her role. There is no middle ground. Architects and design professionals can argue that as proxies of a client, they are powerless to effect change and that theirs is not a social role to play. This attitude is naïve and shortsighted at best and an excuse to reinforce and profit from oppressive practices at worst. Designers who are acting on the built environment have the power regarding the projects that they take, the places in which they choose to work, the processes that they employ, the voices that they hear, and the design decisions that they influence and control. Let us also reconsider what it means to embrace the margin as a means of practice.

Conclusion

I have sought out my own community of reconciliation and we have created marginal spaces together. It has required a constant intentionality on my part. The longer I am part of this physical and figurative community, the less sure I am about my opinions regarding the issues at hand. After fourteen years of seeking a worthwhile process for teaching community engagement, I continue to learn and make mistakes. I am constantly reminded that this is extremely hard work: when students resist critical reflection and base their strongly-held opinions on little knowledge; when they voice frustration and discomfort or demand answers to questions; when community members speak out in anger, shun opportunities for interaction, hold on to feelings of hopelessness, or attack my motives; when logistics fall apart and finances evaporate; when I am angered by the ambivalence of those around me, struggle with acting on my professed convictions, am tempted to insulate myself and my family from discomfort, or just lack the energy required for this kind of teaching. When one struggles to enter the marginal space of resistance, however, they are changed and there is no turning back. It is there that I look for and sometimes find the beloved community.