Original Research

Experiential Extractivism in Service-Learning and Community Engagement: What We Take and What We Leave Behind

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Abstract

Extractivism is so often characterized as resource extractivism – the exploitation of a community's natural resources for economic gain. However, when we think about the relationships between community and university, there are many ways in which the university can take out of the community or benefit to an extent that extracts human, capital, and natural resources. I contend that some of the university-community engagement work that has been done in the last 20 years replicates colonial structures in ways that have harmed communities under the well-intentioned guise of service-learning, community-based learning, or "development." Drawing on Du Bois (1947) and on Riofrancos' (2020) work on colonialism and extractivism, this paper will explore the role of the university as both a transformer and oppressor through global learning. I will explore the promise and pitfalls for these engaged pedagogies, and propose pathways to avoiding unjust, extractive practices in the pursuit of learning and student development. I will end with recommendations for just, equitable, and critical community-based global learning and some promising examples.

Keywords: epistemic justice, extractivism, community-based learning, global learning, social justice, decolonization

Introduction

In his speech, An Appeal to the World, Du Bois (1947) warned of the dangers and abuses resulting from the United States' imperialistic tendencies. Driven by undemocratic elements to subjugate and colonize, he highlights the abuse of communities of color for white benefit. These harms – including those perpetrated by universities – serve further to disenfranchise populations within and outside of the U.S. This is not surprising when one evaluates the history of university engagement with communities. So often, community engagement is portrayed with the assumption that the endeavor is inherently positive and held up as an ideal for university engagement.

I contend that some of the university-community engagement work done in the last 20 years replicates colonial structures in ways that have harmed communities under the well-intentioned guise of service-learning, community-based learning, outreach, or "development." Drawing on thinkers like Du Bois (1947) and Riofrancos' (2020) work on colonialism and extractivism, this paper will explore the university's role as a transformer and oppressor through community engagement. I will explore the promise and pitfalls of these engaged pedagogies and propose pathways to avoiding unjust, extractive practices in the pursuit of learning and student development. I will end with recommendations for just, equitable, and critical community-based learning and engagement and promising examples.

Literature Review

What Do I Mean by Community Engagement?

What is the role of a university as a community partner? What are the expectations? What are the ethical mandates? The role of the university is inherently engaged in community and founded upon a premise of public purposes (Lagemann & Lewis, 2015). However, how that is realized can vary dramatically. Motivations for engagement can range from good neighbor behavior to educational engagement to economic benefits. For example, there are community engagement offices on campuses that focus solely on co-curricular or club engagement. Other offices might be focused on deep academic projects or issue-specific community engagement efforts. Some campuses have community and government relations offices, which work with governmental entities or area chambers of commerce. Others (e.g., Pitt) have home offices in multiple neighborhoods that engage community members in an ongoing, boundary-less partnership.

Community engagement can encompass a span of activities. Not all "community engagement" is truly engagement with the community. It is important to appreciate the wide variability of how engagement can be realized – from uni-directional outreach to co-creative collaborations. In addition to the many formats of activities that community engagement can take, it is important to

note that the design and intentionality of those partnerships also vary. Key et al. (2019) outline a continuum of community engagement that names equity indicators (e.g., power, decision-making) and contextual factors (e.g., history, transparency) alongside a spectrum that spans from "no community involvement" to "community-driven or community-led." That framing directly affects where community voice enters, whether or not local knowledge is valued and validated, and whether the autonomy and dignity of communities are being preserved in that partnership (Porter et al., 2014). The ivory tower perception of universities in communities is rooted, too, in assumptions of power and privilege that connect implicitly and explicitly to class and race (Bradley, 2018). The following section will delve more into the connections between race, colonialism, and engagement.

Whiteness, Colonialism, and Community Engagement

Whiteness in higher education is a construct that has been studied for its ties to colonialism and its impact on how higher education norms and values have emerged. Historian Stefan Bradley (2018) points to the role of elite institutions as a developer and producer of world leaders and their critical role in systemic power and privilege. Noting this critical role in the social and political fabric, he documents the work done between WWII and the 1970s to intentionally address white supremacy in these institutions and shift the culture to a more diversified, inclusive higher education. Schick (2000) also contends with the colonial vestiges upon Canadian higher education, noting the indelible impact of whiteness on everything from the authors assigned in courses to who are the rightful occupants of university spaces.

Individual contention with identity and whiteness is also important for engendering cultural humility in ourselves as educators and in our students. Linley (2017) points to her home state of Iowa, a state colonized at the brutal expense of 17 Indigenous tribes, as a place that centered on "rugged individualism" and erased the contributions and history of those who came before. She calls for the direct reflection and unpacking of identity in higher education to help students better situate their lived experience and understand the diversity and impact of history on community. Du Bois (1910) outlines whiteness as a construct and a rationale for colonialism in his seminal essay "The Souls of White Folks." He points explicitly to extractive, exploitative use of individuals: "The European world is using black and brown men for all the uses which men know" (p. 6). This quote gives us pause to reflect upon the role of community partners – especially those in minoritized or Global South contexts – and how universities use the human resources of those communities to deliver educational experiences.

To understand community engagement and global learning's connection to colonialism, we have to address the processes and nuances of global community-based learning. De Andreotti (2014) cautions educators:

> This generation, encouraged and motivated to 'make a difference,' will then project their beliefs and myths as universal and reproduce power relations and violence similar to those in colonial times. How can we design educational processes that move learners away from this tendency? (p. 21)

Here, de Andreotti points to an important tension within community engagement and "world-changing" narratives that students may absorb in their education. On one hand, students have the capacity and agency to catalyze change in this world. Relatedly, the capacity to overestimate one's singular effect on the world, as well as the dangers of speaking for a population, can cause harm. Students who want to be agents of change need to hold this tension productively and cultivate the skillsets and mindsets to avoid harming. This includes but is not limited to, cultural humility, communication skills, critical reflection, contextual understanding, and process knowledge of ethical community engagement.

Thinking about these tensions and the many ways that community engagement can play both a harmful and helpful role in the quest for justice in our societies, I offer the following chart. What follows is an articulation of the duality of community engagement. On the left, I outline different attributes or activities of community engagement. In the middle and right columns, that attribute has corresponding negative or positive impact.

Attribute	Negative (Harmful)	Positive (Beneficial)
Knowledge	Devaluation	Epistemic Justice
Decision-Making	Dependency	Sovereignty
Narrative	White saviorism / deficit-based	Asset-based
Relationship	Transactional	Transformative
Resources	Extraction/ exploitation	Investment
Assessment	External / top-Down	Iterative, engaged

FIGURE 1. The duality of community engagement.

Extractivism

Another framing to understand the challenges of colonialism and community engagement is through the lens of extractivism. Extractivism is often characterized as resource extractivism – the exploitation of a community's natural resources for economic gain. However, when we think about the relationships between community and university, there are many ways in which the university can take out of the community or benefit to an extent that extracts human, capital, and natural resources. Riofrancos' (2020) focus is petropolitics in Ecuador, but the salient lessons are applicable and translatable across many contexts. In her work, she elaborates on the complexity of communities, which is a lesson for university educators and researchers. Narratives of

community can be monolithic or simplistic – outlining a divide between university and community or government and community as if neat lines were separating the two.

In Riofrancos' work, however, she notes the multiple motivations, identities, and benefits/challenges that can mean different parties within those categories can be at odds. For instance, she notes the role power and resources play in community relations, where the security of individual families or kinship relationships is tied up with the complicity of extractivist activities such as mining or stripping the land of natural resources. Near-term security or the promise of financial investment by extractors can put community members in a position of vulnerability. In a parallel example, university-community relationships can often replicate those power dynamics, with community partners signing on to projects or accepting university development initiatives with the promise of jobs or security in the future. A perception of powerlessness or futility does not challenge encroachment or extraction.

Universities are centers of power and privilege. Access to resources – human, capital, and tangible – as well as the reputational power of the institution can make for uneven engagements across university-community partnerships. Negotiating power – the right of refusal, openness and transparency in communication, shared governance, and formalization of partnerships – are tools that can help articulate and make visible the power imbalances to prevent harm in the community (Preece, 2013; Sandmann & Kliewer, 2012). If not addressed, power imbalances can impact the quality of relationships among stakeholders, remove decision-making power from key community members, impact the community's self-concept and pride, and further an understanding of university as a benevolent technocrat versus equal stakeholder (Brackmann, 2013; Head, 2007).

What Do Community Engagement, Global Learning, and De-Colonialism Have to Do with One Another?

One direct way power imbalances can emerge is through partnerships around learning and educational programming with community partners. Community-based global learning (CBGL) is often held up as a practice and pedagogy full of promise. Yet, it also carries the potential to harm communities if done poorly. CBGL can either transform stakeholders (students, educators, and community) or undermine their autonomy and thriving. Community engagement done poorly can be used as a siphon out of several things from the local community, such as integrity and respect, self-determination, and indigenous knowledge.

De-colonial and anti-colonial approaches to education and engagement have grown in recent years. There has been increased focus and attention on investment in communities (Ehlenz, 2020), transformative reciprocity (Collopy et al., 2020), epistemic justice (Benavides, 2022), and actively countering saviorism in disciplines or programs with a global learning focus (Gendle &

Tapler, 2022). Framings have emerged, such as Fair Trade Learning (Hartman et al., 2023), which is a multi-pronged approach to community engagement and global learning that is rooted in ethics and values – as well as actionable, tangible steps – to address the vestiges of colonialism, emphasize global interdependence, and invest in the local communities of our global and place-based learning initiatives. Again, the potential for community engagement as a positive influence is high if co-designed with intention and justice at the center.

A Note About Intent and Impact

Intent and impact are often difficult concepts for faculty, researchers, and students with which to contend. Well-intentioned, learned, and agentic individuals who believe in the public good often do not understand how their actions could be problematic. Students passionate about social change can be confused about the pushback or criticality around their engagement with community. The purpose of this work is not to call out specific programs or note work being done in the field to shame. Rather, the evaluation of literature, reflections on programs and initiatives in higher education, and self-reflection from past and recent experiences will help inform the following analysis: illuminating the dangers of community engagement done uncritically and highlighting promising practices that can help advance decolonizing our community engagement.

Analysis: Operationalizing Extractivism and Coloniality in Community Engagement

I start by asking the following question: What extractivism looks like in these different permutations of community engagement? The next section will elaborate on examples from literature evaluation and lived experience.

Exploitation

Extractivism can be seen in community partners' use of time, labor, and talent. In reviewing the literature, the work and labor of community partners can take many forms. They can serve as subject matter experts, cultural guides, co-educators, connectors, labor, data sources, sponsors, and host families. Sometimes, this work is compensated, while other times, their service is contingent upon an agreed understanding of reciprocity or mutuality that will yield a positive result. Worrall (2007) articulates well the many motivations that community-based organizations (CBOs) hold in engaging with universities, from the promise of helping to create more engaged, educated citizens to bridging racial or class divides to advancing the mission of the organizations. However, exploitation becomes an issue when community members, as uncompensated for time spent on projects, are used for their identity or social capital or, in

extreme cases, used as test subjects for paraprofessional training (Wendland et al. 2016; Sullivan, 2011).

Diminished Autonomy

One way in which community-university partnerships can contribute to a culture of extractivism is by creating projects, partnerships, or interventions that disempower or denigrate local communities. Projects created without community voice, for instance, or based on assumptions that denigrate local communities can negatively impact communities and break trust between the university and community (Brunton et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2011). Community engagement without community voice makes the work less approachable, accessible, useful, and appropriate for the community. It is also often less technically useful due to the disconnect between local knowledge and context.

Epistemic Injustice and Epistemicide

Epistemic injustice can occur when local knowledge and community voice are devalued or diminished in intellectual or academic scholarship. A more intentional and intellectually violent version of epistemic injustice is *epistemicide* - the process of erasing a community's or culture's knowledge contributions via "dominant literature," academic erasure, or force. Epistemicide actively degrades the contributions of those from the Global South and traditionally marginalized or minoritized populations to ensure a colonial (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Ndlovu (2018) points to the colonization of minds in Africa, for instance, as the memories and knowledge of Africans have been erased through violence, societal pressure, incarceration, and forced schooling.

Community partnerships often reinforce this type of entrenched colonization of schooling and socialization. We see epistemic injustice through the lack of community partners that attend conferences, the deference to intellectual "experts," and an absence of co-publishing with community partners. The questions of what knowledge matters and who is a knowledge producer plague our work. Additionally, the explicit devaluation of local and Indigenous knowledge adds to this epistemic injustice. An example is public health scholarship and academic partners that refer to Indigenous medicinal wisdom as "folklore" or use other phrases to minimize its weight and impact (Simonds & Christopher, 2013).

Deficit Narratives

The perpetuation of deficit narratives is a complicated, difficult way that universities can deplete community energy and autonomy. This can range from how students think and talk about their communities (Hattam & Prosser, 2008) to research that portrays communities as deficient or ignorant (Hyett et al., 2019). Deficit narratives impact not only the confidence and self-

perception of communities. Still, they can bias the researcher or educator in a way that impedes the quality and dignity of the educational or research experience for and with the community.

Saviorism and Slacktivism

White saviorism is well-documented as a potential pitfall of community-engaged work, especially when volunteers, researchers, or learners from more resourced communities are working with those with less material resources. Therein lies an assumption about capacity and capability, which devalues the community and disempowers individuals.

Unfortunately, with expeditious social media such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, individuals engaging in these behaviors can frame them in a narrative that glorifies the act and is self-centered in the realization. A resurgence of slacktivism – empty symbolic gestures about social issues with no action or tangible good - and online posturing related to individual activism and engagement has re-introduced harmful narratives of saviorism.

In addition to individual students' social media, there is a tendency to glorify the university's role in community. Through marketing and online branding through university offices, there can be a tendency to highlight an uncritical, overwhelmingly positive view of the university's engagement to boost the institution's reputation and drive positive public opinion. Promoting the positive aspects of a community-university partnership is not inherently bad. We must ensure, however, that those who have engaged in that partnership are spoken about with dignity and respect for their autonomy and agency, which must also be clear.

Discussion: Can We Shift the Paradigm from Extractive to Transformative?

Understanding these many barriers and vestiges of coloniality in our community engagement, we are left with the question: *Are universities able to engage with community outside these colonialist structures? And, if so, how can we shift away from more extractive colonial partnerships and practices?*

While some cite the dismantling of structures comes from using the tools of the colonizers, others caution that operation in a system informed by colonialism will never result in the type of transformation that brings about justice and equity (Paton et al., 2020; Ndlovu, 2019; Gorski, 2008). It is critical to hold and understand this tension but not let it paralyze efforts to work towards the greater good. Palmer (2011) offers five habits for higher education in the pursuit of strengthening our democracy, which can also be applied to efforts of decolonization. Along with habits of interdependence and community, he also recognizes that one of these essential habits is the ability for individuals to hold tension in productive ways.

In this section, I will highlight some examples of explicit and implicit de-colonial approaches to our work in hopes of raising work done thoughtfully, ethically, and transformatively. Utilizing an asset-based, appreciative inquiry approach to this work, I want to highlight four examples of how this work can show up: policy, professional development, practice, and pedagogy.

Policy: Aligning Values in Governance Documents: ITGA

The International Town & Gown Association (2023) emphasizes a broad umbrella approach to engagement, prioritizing shared community and university interests. It is in their DEIA statement (ITGA, 2024). However, the values and motivation for this work take a more constructively critical view. Namely, they focus on the tenet of their work as expressly reckoning with colonial histories and community harms that have shaped community-university relationships: "Town and Gown partners recognize historic and current inequities and collaboratively leverage assets that reduce trauma and support town-and-gown recovery."

By applying a power analysis and critical-historical lens to partnerships and holding the national membership body to that shared understanding, they address reparative processes at a systemic level. As defined by the United Nations, reparations have five conditions: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. The ITGA's statement meets the condition of satisfaction. Still, it can also lead to the reflection necessary to bring about other conditions ranging from symbolic actions to legal or structural changes to ensure more safety or transparency.

Professional Development: Field-Building for Ethical Community Engagement

The Community-based global learning collaborative (The Collaborative) is a member organization of nonprofits, community organizations, and universities focused on ethical, just, and aspirational de-colonial global learning. The organization brings together scholar-practitioners who are critical voices in community-based global learning. Through their ongoing knowledge mobilization efforts, the group hosts webinars, institutes, and collaborative writing projects. The group creates learning and sharing opportunities to better develop its members' skills, attitudes, and knowledge.

One such effort is the Global Interdependence Toolkit (Hartman & Brandauer, 2022, an open educational resource that provides adaptable modules for educators, community partners, and learners to explore issues of local and global importance. This resource explicitly aims to adapt, adopt, and curate resources for educators to introduce concepts of global citizenship, global interdependence, and decoloniality to their students and colleagues.

The module on Land Restitution (Belfi & Sandiford, 2022), for instance, weaves together resources from the Land Back movement, Winnebago news sources, the Associated Press, the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, and local media to mobilize knowledge of the decolonization and return of land as a tangible act of reparations. The compilation of resources weaves together multiple viewpoints and reflections on the Land Back movement and creates a critical evaluation of reparations efforts and their ties to justice. In addition to the emphasis on inclusion and representation in the materials, the module is accessible regarding delivery modes, language, context, and technology. Each module ends with reflection questions that help the learner reflect and apply the lessons to their experience.

The learning modules are free and open access. Regular webinars and educational programs are held to support educators in developing their capacity to teach these issues, as well as how to utilize the toolkit in their courses, activities, or other educational programming. The toolkit has been used as supplemental modules for university classes and as preparatory work for community engagement by students across ages, stages, and contexts.

Practice: Research Collaboratives for Transformative Futures

Community-based participatory research is another powerful activity that can directly address the challenges and harms listed above if designed well and with shared goals and autonomy. Some researchers, for instance, have leveraged co-collaborative research projects to address transformative social change. A recent (2023) special issue of *Peace Psychology*, for example, focuses on decoloniality and its impact on society, as well as the academy and academic research in psychology. I will highlight two examples of collaborative research work that emphasize justice and decoloniality.

The National Research Center for Integrated Natural Disaster Management in Santiago, Chile, is one strong example of research with an explicitly de-colonial lens. The collective is a multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional team that is working together to address a common goal of understanding and mitigating the negative effects of climate change while also centering the de-colonial and critical approaches to understanding climate vulnerability of populations in the Global South (Atallah et al., 2021). Their work explores concepts such as resilience through a critical lens to understand how power and expectations of "bouncing back" are attributed to colonial ways of thinking, driving policy and support that could further disempower populations. By leveraging a critical community resilience praxis, they bring together stakeholders to promote more just, reasonable, and contextual understandings of climate adaptation.

Another example of collaborative, de-colonial, and community-engaged research can be seen in the work of Atallah et al. (2018) on transformative community engagement in the West Bank. The integrative partnership of psychologists, cultural studies practitioners, and Asian-American

studies scholars is directly addressing the impact of settler-colonialism on Palestinian communities in the West Bank. Using de-colonial framings to address power dynamics and historical trauma, the researchers are remaking qualitative approaches to psychology and social science to not replicate systemic sciences' potential biases and pathologies unto those communities. The results affirm the transformative potential of community-based participatory research to include and support community partners and develop relational trust for more impactful interventions.

These are but two examples of research done with an explicit de-colonial lens. While researchers are still learning and growing their de-colonial practices, it is important to note the promise that these practices show for those who wish to center justice in their research and work in a world that has been so shaped by colonialism.

Pedagogy: Critical Project-Based Learning

Finally, one of the most effective steps we can take as educators is through curricular changes within our academy. Freire (1970) emphasized the concept of conscientization – the ability to cultivate a critical consciousness in education through grappling with histories of oppression and identifying the actionable steps an individual can take to fight against those forces. By creating experiences that help prepare our future active citizens in ways that are critical, compassionate, and in pursuit of justice, students are learning and practicing the skillsets and mindsets for critical global citizenship.

Throughout high-impact curricula in post-secondary education, students have opportunities to engage in project-based learning with community partners and/or with a global focus. One such program is the first-year, project-based seminar at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), called the Great Problems Seminar. Approximately 30 percent of the incoming first-year students opt to engage in this program. Each course is focused on a specific global grand challenge that can be connected to the United Nations sustainable development Goals (SDGs). These include courses with topics such as Climate Change, Extinctions, and Shelter the World.

Within those courses, first-year students grapple with what it means to do ethical community-engaged research in connection to their STEM education and how community-based and project-based learning can be leveraged for transformative change. Students learn about inclusive teaming, epistemic justice, critical thinking, and how to approach a problem ethically and led by community voice. In addition to the project and practice of the course, the students are exposed to thinking through readings, videos, podcasts, and other artifacts that come from a variety of knowledge traditions and contexts. Faculty in the program have creatively adapted and adopted open educational resources (OERs) to ensure more epistemic justice and polyvocality in their materials. In addition, faculty have supported the co-authorship and creation of OERs to support

student growth and identity as knowledge-creators while also providing a pathway for better representation in scholarship from traditionally underrepresented populations.

Recommendations: Strategies to Address Extractivism/Decoloniality for Higher Education

Reviewing the literature and examples from the field above, we can identify some clear lessons to help universities be good partners, center community voices, and chip away at the vestiges of historical harms.

Reckon with History

We must reckon with a difficult history and the power dynamics that persist despite evolving models and approaches in the field that are available but underutilized. For instance, for nearly a decade, community engagement researchers have been pointing to Fair Trade Learning as such a model. It highlights an ethical approach to engagement that is ethical not only in intention but also in tangible, operational steps such as community-level investment, shared governance, and tackling head-on the white saviority that can creep into the attitudes of university partners. This is also a space to reckon with power and privilege. Educators and program hosts can ensure that educational and research experiences are explicitly designed to address power and positionality in preparation for, reflection on, and re-entry of the student after an international, place-based, and/or cross-cultural experience. For instance, if students are traveling to or working in a community with a deep colonial history – especially as it relates to the current systems of governance and power in that place, part of their preparation and reflection should address and educate on that history.

Honor Many Ways of Knowing (Epistemic Justice)

In addition to partnership on shared projects, a practice that actively counters the concern of epistemicide raised earlier is co-producing knowledge artifacts. Whether this is co-publishing articles in academic journals with authorship from university and community, presenting at local civic and governmental presentations (e.g., city council or public library talks), creating digital humanities artifacts (e.g., digital storytelling maps), or other publicly-available works. This allows for ample community voice and narrative-making that counter white savior stories, builds on local knowledge, and appreciates the many ways of knowing, a hallmark of epistemic justice.

Bell (2010) outlines four types of stories that can be helpful or harmful to social justice movements in her work on storytelling for social justice. These include the stock (basic, sanitized version of our historical narratives), the concealed stories that are rarely told, resistance stories

that refute the popular understandings, and counterstories. Counter-/transformative stories are the stories that are intentionally meant to recast the world in a more justice-oriented, comprehensive telling of truths. Robinson and Del Rio (2023) emphasize the need for counterstories as it relates to decolonizing the lived experience of folks of color to break down "interlocking systems of oppression (p.178)" for more just futures.

Make Knowledge Accessible, Mobile, and Representative

Open educational resources (OERs) are open-access materials that span written articles, books, chapters, videos, and other intellectual artifacts that are open and accessible to all. They are usually protected under a Creative Commons license, which allows free distribution. Many of these also allow for creative additions or adaptations of the material to contacts specific to classrooms. Lambert (2019) emphasizes that using open educational resources is not limited to financial accessibility. Rather, it is a central part of epistemic justice and social justice for learners and communities worldwide as it allows for scholarly identity and authorship to be boosted in underrepresented populations, increases representation, for example, to young learners, and provides access to materials to further one's education.

Affirm an Asset-Based Lens

Adopting and affirming an asset-based framing is the clearest strategy to counter the deficit narratives that can often plague community engagement initiatives (Montañez, 2023; Shabazz & Cooks, 2014). The benefits, assets, and characteristics that make a place special are foregrounded through asset-based thinking and language. This allows for not only a renewed sense of motivation and confidence in the purposeful work being done, but also helps planners understand the full landscape of resources and talents already present in the community that can aid a successful project or initiative. The figure below outlines the differences between asset-based and deficit-based approaches to community engagement, adapted from the work of Mathie and Cunningham (2003).

Asset-Based	Deficit-Based
• Everyone has gifts	• Every community has challenges
• Citizens at the center	• Problems are at the forefront
• Leaders involve others	• Leadership and experts at the center
• People care	• People care
• Listen	• Speak
• Ask	• Tell
• Inside-out organization	• Institutions dictate priorities for the
• Institutions serve the community	community

FIGURE 2. Asset-based vs. deficit-based community engagement (adapted from Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Act Genuinely and in Solidarity

Clifford (2017) emphasizes the importance of solidarity – rather than reciprocity – in bringing about social justice, as solidarity emphasizes unity in motivation, goals, and values. This includes but is not limited to, the ability to act, vote, and shop in accordance with the values that prioritize community and community thriving. This act also calls for prioritizing acts of solidarity rather than simple symbolic gestures. Avoiding performativity – hollow acts of symbolism – is key. Performativity can run the gamut from hollow land acknowledgments (without context or encouragement for deeper engagement) to slacktivism (e.g., changing one's profile picture to "stand with" a population). Rather, we seek to walk the talk via acts that align with the community's values and goals in meaningful and values-aligned ways (Bandy et al., 2016).

Practice Critical Reflection

Finally, we should all reflect and question our roles as members of communities and campuses on the systemic and individual capacity to make changes towards more de-colonial university-community engagement. For our students, reflection – frequently and in multiple modes – should be leveraged to deepen the transformative learning process for students and help them make meaning of the new knowledge and disorienting dilemmas presented in their experiential learning (Alam, 2022; Brookfield, 2010; Mezirow, 1990). Within curriculum and programming, educators need to create ample space for students to contend with issues of their role in community engagement, connect their lived experiences and identities to their work, and grapple with the tensions and frictions they may feel based on the new information about societal issues that can be brought up through the community-based experience.

Educators and researchers must do the same. The often-isolating nature of higher education can keep us from unpacking issues that shape our experience in the academy. Yet, we must be checking our power and privilege, as well as recognizing the identities we carry beyond our professional roles to introduce intersecting issues and opportunities. A few questions that we can leverage for our practices and context are as follows:
- What is higher education's role in justice and anti- or de-colonial community engagement?
- How can we continue to pursue community engagement in liberatory ways?
- What ways do each of our practices, scholarships, or projects directly invest in communities?
- How do we conduct ourselves in community engagement from a place of solidarity?
- What are small steps we can start taking tomorrow that could help nudge our institutions and partnerships in more just and equitable ways?

Conclusion

In a 1960 speech to the Association of Negro Social Science Teachers, *Whither now and why*, Du Bois focuses on the role of educators to challenge and transform systems of knowledge. He holds up the hope of education as a transformer of society while also critiquing the traditions of U.S. educational systems and universities that undercut multiple ways of knowing through the supremacy of Western "classical" knowledge. In Du Bois' speech, he encourages educators to reject the "new American slavery of thought" – epistemic injustice – and seek the truth even if it is uncomfortable or risky. He encourages education for the public good and the potential for individuals to use their education not only to seek financial security but to work towards peace and just futures.

Community engagement and community-based learning are powerful opportunities for individual and systemic change toward just, thriving, and equitable futures. Yet, community engagement done poorly can lead to unintended negative outcomes and a furthering of both material and epistemic injustice. This can take the form of well-intentioned but ill-informed student project work, deficit framing of the communities, dysfunctional rescuing, and strained relationships – or distrust – of universities and their representatives. Intentional design and thoughtful planning are still not norms of community engagement, and one of the missing factors that drive these unintended consequences is an absence of cultural humility, critical reflection, and valuation of community expertise.

It does not have to be this way. If done well and in partnership, community-based global learning can be transformative on levels from individual to systemic. The examples highlighted in this paper showcase what could be when higher education takes proactive, critical steps to ensure their policy, professional development, practices, and pedagogy advance ethical, de-colonial community engagement.

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