

## **Border Pedagogy: A Critical Framework for Service-Learning**

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*This paper proposes that the metaphors “border crossing” and “borderlands,” drawn from a critical postmodern perspective, are new and powerful lenses for viewing the often contradictory and conflictive experiences of university students engaged in service-learning. The border crossing metaphor serves as a starting point for understanding the ambiguity and conflicts inherent in service-learning as opportunities for the development of new modes of thought and bridging differences across current boundaries of class and culture. Extending these metaphors, we identify key elements of a border pedagogy for service-learning, which has the potential to transform service-learning into an active rather than passive space for critical reflection, creation of oppositional knowledge, and the development of a radical democracy.*

### **Introduction**

At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through both serpent and eagle eyes. (Anzaldua, 1990, p. 378)

This is a story of coming to see service-learning from a new perspective. In this story, we describe how our students' narratives led us to this new perspective. We suggest how the metaphors of border crossing and borderlands, as reflective of a critical postmodern perspective, can illuminate the service-learning experience for students. These metaphors suggest how service-learning prompts students to understand their own culture in new ways, appreciate cultural differences, become more critically aware of social inequities and power relations, and envision a more democratic society. We will offer some of our preliminary ideas about the implications of border pedagogy (Giroux, 1992) for service-learning.

Our discussion is based on our experiences of teaching and researching a course including community service at a large state university. The course, Adult Literacy and Community Service, is offered through the program in Continuing and Vocational Education. The general focus of the course is to increase students' understanding of adult literacy as a societal issue, and to support their involvement as tutors in local adult literacy

programs. The course gives students the opportunity to interact with other adult students whose socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds are very different from their own. The course was developed, along with many others at institutions across the nation, with funds from the federal Student Literacy Corps program, as a means to promote the involvement of college students in community service. Students complete 60 hours of tutoring during the semester. They also participate in a weekly class that emphasizes group discussion of issues and insights arising from the tutoring experience.

In an effort to understand what students learn from their experience in the course, we have been collecting and analyzing various source material. This source material includes written tutor expectations collected at the start of each semester, tutor journals, final reflection papers, and transcripts of exit interviews conducted with each student. An additional source of information has been instructor notes from class and small group discussions. We selected a small sample of tutors who represented diverse characteristics and academic backgrounds for our initial study. Broad categories of potential learning outcomes were generated from an initial analysis of tutor journals. The categories included perceptions of adult literacy learners, the nature of literacy, outcomes of literacy education, tutoring activities, self as a tutor and learner, nature of literacy programs, and roles of literacy teachers. With the help of another research assistant, we have been developing case profiles of individual