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Cover photo: St. Thomas University students and community partners descend from a day of work with Cocano coffee cooperative partners in La Croix St. Josef, Haiti. Cover design by Antwon Key, master’s student in advertising and public relations at The University of Alabama.

The Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship is published at The University of Alabama by the Division of Community Affairs to advance the scholarship of engagement worldwide. To reach the editor, send an email to jces@ua.edu or call 205-348-7392. See also www.jces.ua.edu.
Examining the Commitment of Engaged Scholars: A Call to Action

It is my pleasure to have this opportunity to return to the editor’s page and share my thoughts with the engagement scholarship community. Many of you may have observed that Associate Editor Dr. Nick Sanyal provided the last editorial comments, as I was unable to do so due to a family emergency that took me away from JCES for about four months. My sincere appreciation is extended to Dr. Sanyal, editorial assistant Vicky Carter, and the rest of the JCES team who stepped in and provided leadership for JCES, making sure it met its production schedule. Being home for an extended period of time in the neighborhood in which I grew up (a neighborhood many would consider less than desirable, but will always be home) deeply affected me in relationship to civic engagement, community engagement, and engagement scholarship. I was starkly reminded of the personal impact of societal disparities on individuals’ quality and longevity of life and how these disparities connect to the well-being of families and communities.

Today’s society is one plagued with issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ageism, classism, health disparities, genocide, hunger, homelessness, peonage (convict labor), and violence, domestic and otherwise. Unfortunately, this short list could continue on indefinitely. For example, recent poverty statistics for 2013 released by the U.S. Census Bureau (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014), show that young children continue to be the largest group to live in poverty, leaving them vulnerable to insufficient nutrition and inadequate health care. Shootings of unarmed African American men, current day use of debtors prisons for the poor, bombings that kill innocent children and adult civilians, and international public beheadings leave us feeling fearful, confused, and, in many ways, helpless.

Boyer (1996) refocused the responsibility of institutions of higher education to address societal conditions: “Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation’s most … pressing problems” (p. 15). Boyer made a strong case for those of us in the academy to take ourselves out of the proverbial “ivory towers” and “… become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our more social, civic, economic, and moral problems … (p. 12). Many of these are the issues highlighted above. The question we must ask is how well are academic institutions addressing the issues of our nation and the world? It is a privilege to be an educator, especially at the post-secondary level, where we are entrusted with shaping the minds of the next generation. With that privilege comes a responsibility and with that responsibility comes the mandate to be beacons of integrity. We must be certain to move beyond credentialing students and getting tenure while playing politics to promote our own personal and academic interests. What do we see as the tangible results of our “engaged scholarship”? How committed are we to truly promoting civic engagement, including establishing true partnerships with students and/or communities? How much does the work that we do really contribute to addressing the problems of our nation and the world at large? Are we truly, as engaged scholars, improving the quality of lives of those so negatively affected in this world, and if so, how sustainable are those improvements and changes? At what expense are we willing to move on to pursue that next grant or sole authored article for our dossiers? How do we really define “partnerships” with students and communities who are essential to the work of engagement scholarship? These are complex questions with no easy answers. Yet, we must ask them, no matter how difficult, and seek honest answers to them.

Are we capable of doing more? Are we capable of doing a better job? I say yes. And not only are we capable, we are obligated to do so if engagement scholarship is to be more than a popular trend, clouded by rhetorical talk and practices. This is not to say there is not good engagement work being done or that there are not those who are truly committed to the engagement work that they do. In almost eight years as editor of JCES, I have met many engaged scholars who are committed to the
work that they do, and JCES has published much of their work. This issue is no exception. In this issue of JCES, you will find a wide variety of engagement scholarship. With manuscripts representing work conducted in Haiti, Canada, and Tanzania, theoretical and practical contributions to engagement scholarship are provided. Several of the articles address the many complexities and challenges of working with community partners, providing practical suggestions for addressing these challenges, culturally, contextually, and otherwise. We are quite pleased to have three Student Voices manuscripts in this issue that present the thoughts of one arm of the engagement scholarship triad. Dr. Heather Pleasants, book review editor, includes a strong collection of books on which excellent book reviews are provided. What you may note missing from this issue is a community piece, which I think is partially related to the issue of how much we, engagement scholars, truly value our community partners’ voices. Again, I know we can do better.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of JCES and extend a thank you for all whose contributions make JCES the stellar publication into which it has developed and continues to grow. That would not be possible without your contributions and feedback. So, please share your thoughts, ideas, and insights with us at jces@.ua.edu.

Reference


Haiti: Sustaining Partnerships in Sustainable Development

Anthony Vinciguerra

Abstract

How can universities organize their international community engagement to optimize both student learning and community impact? This article describes the St. Thomas University/Port-de-Paix, Haiti, Global Solidarity Partnership, and provides one model of how a project-focused scaffolding of engaged scholarship opportunities can enhance student learning, empower local communities, and support long-term development.

Introduction

St. Thomas University is a small, urban, archdiocesan Roman Catholic university located in Miami Gardens, Florida. The Diocese of Port-de-Paix (geographically equivalent to the Northwest Department of Haiti) is the sister diocese of the Archdiocese of Miami and is one of the poorest and most isolated regions in Haiti (Mogisha, 2011). Since 2006, St. Thomas has worked with partners in the Diocese of Port-de-Paix to develop the St. Thomas University/Port-de-Paix, Haiti, Global Solidarity Partnership (STU GSP), a collaboration aimed at providing concrete faculty research and student-learning opportunities in the developing world, while supporting long-term, Haitian-led, sustainable development projects in the region.

Due to the limited resources of the university and the difficulties of working in rural Haiti, a model had to be developed that would focus the university's limited means into specific projects that had the greatest potential of making a long-term, sustainable impact. As such, a geographically centered, project-focused model of collaboration was chosen that would include an interdisciplinary scaffolding of engaged scholarship opportunities at the university. The hope was to offer a wide array of research and learning options to faculty and students, while also bringing a broad spectrum of academic resources to bear on the specific needs of the projects as defined by the Haitian partners. Concrete faculty/student research projects, intensive internships, community-based learning courses, and volunteer opportunities have all taken place within this context.

An overview of the historical development, pedagogical model, and community impact of the STU GSP illustrates one example of how a geographically focused, interdisciplinary, multi-tiered community engagement model can both enhance learning opportunities and contribute to long-term community impact – even in one of the poorest regions in the Western Hemisphere.

Historical Context and Project Inception

In 1980, in response to waves of Haitian immigrants arriving on the shores of South Florida, the archbishop of Miami, Edward McCarthy, traveled to Haiti with hopes of addressing the reality these individuals were risking their lives to escape. Leaders from the Haitian episcopal conference sent Archbishop McCarthy to the Diocese of Port-de-Paix – an impoverished, extremely remote region in the northwest of Haiti. While the Northwest Department is Haiti’s oldest region (Columbus arrived in Haiti’s most northwestern point, Mole St. Nicolas, in 1492), its geographic and political isolation from Port-au-Prince has deprived it of the modest level of development that has occurred in other regions. Due to its extreme poverty, and geographical proximity to Florida, the Diocese of Port-de-Paix became one of the main launching areas for Haitian refugees fleeing to the United States.

Upon witnessing the desperate economic, political, and ecological situation of Haiti’s northwest, Archbishop McCarthy immediately established a sister diocese relationship between the Archdiocese of Miami and the Diocese of Port-de-Paix. His hope was that people of the Archdiocese of Miami would build strong relationships of solidarity with the people of Port-de-Paix, dedicate themselves to bettering the social conditions of the area, and in doing so ameliorate the root causes of this dangerous migration (Sherry, 1978).
Amor en Acción, a lay-led missionary group based in Miami, was given responsibility for the sister diocese relationship and spent the next 30 years supporting schools, providing emergency relief, and serving as some of the only consistent aid to this very remote region (Amor en Accion, 2011).

Over the next 30 years, however, Port-de-Paix remained one of the poorest regions in Haiti. With a population of over 600,000, its dry and deforested terrain exacerbated the extreme poverty. The area is accessible by road from Port-au-Prince; however, travel can take between six to nine hours due to poor, unpaved roads and the lack of bridges to cross several rivers. The diocese is centered in a mountainous area with no public water, few roads, and little to no electric power. The population suffers from numerous diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and typhoid fever. Three-fourths of the children in the diocese are malnourished and have parasites. Though the area has consistent health crises, medical attention is rare. For example, there are only 10 doctors for the 100,000 people in the township of Port-de-Paix. Only 18% of children in all of Haiti will go on to high-school and, though precise figures are not available, it is widely believed that this percentage is much lower in Port-de-Paix (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2010). Because of the almost complete lack of infrastructure, aid from international relief and development agencies has remained rare in this remote northwest region (Amor en Accion, 2011; IHSI, 2009; Mogisha, 2011).

In 2006, St. Thomas University was undergoing a restructuring and, as part of this transition, was reviewing both its institutional mission and its international engagement programs. As a Roman Catholic university, St. Thomas had a particular call to address issues of economic inequality in the developing world (John Paul II, 2009). Integrated into its mission and programs were the principles of Catholic social thought – a body of teaching intended to guide just relationships between an individual, institutions, and society. Among these principles are “the dignity of all human life,” a “preferential option for the poor and vulnerable,” and a “commitment to global solidarity” (Mitch, 2011, pp. 8–9). St. Thomas had established a Center for Justice and Peace with the explicit purpose of integrating these values throughout the curriculum and activities of the university. Furthermore, as a specifically archdiocesan-sponsored university (as opposed to a Catholic institution founded by a religious order such as the Jesuits or Franciscans) St. Thomas had the unique institutional commitment “to be of, and serve, its locality” (Iannone, 2010, p. 1).

Despite this institutional commitment to social justice, global solidarity, economic development, and serving its region, St. Thomas in 2006 had no institutional relationship with its own sister diocese of Port-de-Paix. The university had small programs in Spain, China, and Costa Rica, and yet had never sent a delegation to visit Port-de-Paix. Upon reflection on this unfulfilled calling, the Center for Justice and Peace initiated a process aimed at focusing the university’s international engagement specifically on its sister diocese. To begin this process, a small team of faculty and staff was recruited to explore the possibility of a fruitful collaboration between the university and the Diocese of Port-de-Paix.

**Listening Process and Establishment of Collaborative Project Criteria**

The steering committee of faculty and staff first held meetings with the Amor-en-Accion leaders who had helped build the sister-diocesan partnership over the prior 30 years. These early meetings laid the groundwork for what would become key elements in the future St. Thomas/ Port-de-Paix partnership. To begin with, Amor-en-Accion staff recounted the deep distrust that existed in Haiti’s northwest for outside organizations coming to “help.” For years international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had arrived in the region with promises of assistance, only to pull out once difficulties were encountered or project funding ended. Amor-en-Accion made clear that working in northwest Haiti would not be easy, and that if the university was serious about developing an authentic relationship with the region, there must be a long-term commitment to the process. Furthermore, those who had worked in the Northwest Department for years underlined the need for an attitude of “listening and accompaniment” rather than “project creation.” Their experience was that the only lasting projects in Haiti’s northwest were those that were rooted in long-term, deep relationships, and that long sessions of listening, discernment, discussion, and debate would have to take place with Haitian partners well before any specific project plans were made.

With these guiding thoughts, a number of
visits were made to Port-de-Paix with the university steering team during 2006 and 2007 to explore possible areas of collaboration. Meetings were held with local church officials, community leaders, and grass-roots organizations throughout Haiti’s northwest. After two years of travel between the regions, a small group of Haitian leaders (representing community leaders, church leaders, and local Haitian organizations) coalesced as key partners for the university’s collaboration. Amor-en-Accion’s warning about reticence toward outside organizations was well merited, and the Haiti-side partners made clear that any collaborative projects between the university and the region would have to abide by three criteria:

Criteria 1: Empowering/Civil Society Building

From the perspective of the partners in Haiti’s northwest, Haiti’s history was a history of outsiders imposing their ideas on the country’s development. From colonial powers, to dictators, to today’s foreign NGOs, they had experienced outside powers as completely uninterested in local, Haitian-led programs of development. If this was to continue, they explained, Haitians themselves would never take responsibility – or learn how – to identify their own problems and implement their own solutions.

An experience on one of St. Thomas’s early delegations to the Northwest Department brought this message home very clearly, and became a key cultural memory that has helped guide the university’s partnership to this day. The following is a recounting of that event, as it is presented in formation sessions for St. Thomas faculty and students traveling to Port-de-Paix for the first time.

The St. Thomas team had been visiting a number of towns in Haiti’s northwest and listening to community leaders about possible areas of partnership. The group decided to visit the remote mountainside village of Ma Wouj, an area where the Archdiocese of Miami had never worked before. A meeting was called under a thatched hut with Caritas Ma Wouj, the local Catholic church’s relief and development committee. A Haitian priest traveling with the university team explained to the Caritas members that the university was there to learn about any ways they might be able to partner with the community.

After the explanation there was a long silence. Finally, the Caritas leader stood up and asked very seriously, “Why are you here?”

The priest reiterated that the university team had come to learn about possibilities for partnership, that they had been meeting with numerous other locations, etc.

There was again a long silence. The Caritas leader then once again slowly asked the group, “Why are you here?” He continued:

We know how it works. You come here with your ideas for our community. You come with your research projects and plans. You come with your nice backpacks and water bottles – but if you took a drink of our water you would be in the hospital tomorrow, if there was a hospital here….

His voice broke off. Then he continued: “And we know how it will end. You will leave, with those same backpacks and that same water. Nothing will change.”

He sat down and there was a long silence. Then slowly, a very elderly nun stood up and scowled.

“You treat us like dogs!” she exclaimed, pointing at the group. She continued:

All of you – you blan! [derogatory word in Haitian Creole for foreigners of European descent], you white people from America. You come with your projects and your ideas. From when people are children here, they are raised to think only about what the foreigners are going to give them – whether it be a piece of candy, a dollar, or a development project. This is not what the Church calls us to! This is not development! This is not solidarity!

The elderly nun sat down, and there was again a long silence. Finally, the Caritas leader stood up and began to speak again:

We are from this community. We know the problems of our community, and we have our own solutions. And yes, there are areas where we have need, and there may be areas for partnership…. But if you have come with your own projects, with your ideas about what our community needs, then you may leave right now.”
Again there was a long pause. The university team’s leader then began to speak, thanking the group for their honesty, and explained that this was exactly the type of relationship they had hoped for (St. Thomas University/Port-de-Paix, Haiti, Global Solidarity Partnership, 2006).

This initial experience in the town of Ma Wouj proved formational for the university partnership. After this, and numerous other meetings, a clear agreement was made between the university and the Haitian partners that any collaboration would focus on projects led by the local Haitian community themselves. A principle goal of the initiative would be to not only create economic development, but to empower local community initiatives and, in doing so, support the development of an indigenous civil society in the region. As a symbol of this commitment to an empowering relationship, the collaboration would be officially named The St. Thomas University/Port-de-Paix Haiti, Global Solidarity Partnership, drawing on the term “solidarity” as a central tenet of the Catholic social tradition that calls for models of mutual, empowering, collaborative development (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005).

Criteria 2: Long-term Development.

In further conversations, Haitian leaders expressed their dismay that foreign institutions were quick to offer emergency aid in times of crisis, but unwilling to commit to long-term social or economic development projects in the region. In their own words, they wanted partners who would focus on “auto sufficiency” for their community. There was widespread sentiment that many international partners were involved in these collaborations simply to feel good rather than really focus on the community’s future. Some leaders did not see the motives as so benign. They argued that the international NGOs were really in this work for their own benefit — that if the community’s problems were truly addressed then the NGOs would be “out of work” — and that the NGOs actually had a self-interest in the community’s underdevelopment.

While seemingly extreme, this critique is actually quite common in rural Haiti and has come to the forefront as international partners deeply examine their motives and commitment (Schwartz, 2010; Klarreich & Polman, 2012; Watkins, 2013). In light of these critiques, and as building the long-term sustainability of the community was part of the university’s goal as well, an agreement was made that the university’s work would focus on long-term projects aimed at building the self-sufficiency of the region.

Criteria 3: Relationships of Mutuality

Finally, the Haitian partners expressed their sentiment that while there was extreme poverty in Haiti’s northwest, there was also much to offer the university as a context for learning. Haiti in many ways is a microcosm that reflects the structural challenges facing other developing nations, and the local community’s voice about these challenges (and the solutions they have developed over the years) was presented as an opportunity to educate and develop globally aware, civic-minded students. As mentioned earlier, the growing literature on international community-based learning (CBL) supports this perspective (Bringle et al., 2011; Ibrahim, 2012).

At the same time, as a small university, St. Thomas did not have the resources that might be needed for all forms of potential collaboration. As such, a final criterion to the partnership was added that any potential projects must be a good match between the community’s self-identified needs and the university’s current academic resources.

Project Identification

After two years of meetings and discussions at both the university and in Haiti, it was decided that three projects had the greatest potential for partnership. These will be detailed below.

The Café COCANO Fair-Trade Coffee Project

One of the first possibilities identified by the Haitian partners was a collaboration in the export and marketing of coffee from Haiti to the United States. Northwest Haiti has some of the oldest coffee-growing traditions in the Americas, as coffee was introduced to the area by the French in the early 1700s and it quickly became one of the first major export commodities from the Caribbean. By the late 18th century Haiti was the world’s single largest producer of coffee, and it remained Haiti’s largest export commodity for the next 200 years (Dunington, 2001).

By the mid-20th century, however, Haiti was having difficulty competing on the world coffee market. Haiti’s weak domestic infrastructure was driving up the cost of production, while international coffee prices were plumeting
due to overproduction in Latin American and Asia. Furthermore, the speculator-exportation system that had existed for generations in Haiti kept payments to farmers at a minimum and concentrated profits in the hands of regional coffee brokers. These factors created prices so low for rural Haitian farmers that they began to uproot their coffee trees and in their place plant corn, beans, and root vegetables to feed their families. Unlike coffee, however, these crops did little to maintain soil on hillsides, thus contributing to the deforestation and leading to mudslides during the rainy season. Mud would then pool along the coastline, killing off reefs and destroying the fishing economy of many seaside villages. This collective process only worsened the extreme poverty of the region, and led to the abandonment of much of the northwest’s coffee (INESA, 2001).

Contemporary farmers of the region knew that their coffee was organic, and of a very high-quality, heirloom variety. They also knew that farmers would save their coffee trees, and in fact plant more, if they could get a better price for the beans. The challenge, however, was that they did not have a mechanism for getting the coffee to foreign markets in a way that would ensure them a fair price.

While St. Thomas University had no programs in agriculture or agronomy, the university did have programs in marketing, management, accounting, and international business. It was agreed that the university’s STU GSP team would join with the newly formed Cafeiere et Cacouyere du Nord’Ouest (COCANO) coffee cooperative to begin to research the development of a direct/fair-trade partnership. The goal was to develop a long-term business plan and infrastructure that would support the farmers in getting the coffee directly to foreign markets, while ensuring them a price at or above international fair-trade standards.

There was much skepticism about the probability of success. Haiti has a long history of failed cooperatives. Never in the history of the Haiti’s northwest had there been any such direct/fair-trade export system, and there would be significant opposition from the speculators who had for years benefited from the current arrangement. With these challenges clearly in view, the university team began its work.

The Atelye Thevenet Fair-Trade Artisan Project

In addition to the coffee collaboration, another Haitian-led project was proposed by communities in the most western regions of the Northwest Department – areas so deforested that they could no longer produce coffee. Haiti has a rich and varied artisan production tradition and northwest Haiti is part of that tradition. A network of Haitian women had come together with the assistance of a local religious community to develop an artisan workshop that would provide job training, be collaboratively run, and offer economic independence to Haitian women of the region. A partnership was soon developed between the university and the Atelye Thevenet artisan cooperative in Jean-Rabel, a small town about 25 miles west of Port-de-Paix. As with the COCANO partnership, the university team would work with the artisan cooperative to research areas of potential market growth and develop a system for the import, marketing, and sales of the artisan items to foreign buyers.

The St. Thomas/Port-de-Paix Solar Energy Initiative

Finally, as noted earlier, access to reliable electricity is an ongoing barrier to development in the northwest of Haiti. There is only limited public electricity in the region’s capital of Port-de-Paix and none outside of this area. As such, lighting is most often by candle or lamp, and cooking most often by charcoal – another significant contributor to the deforestation of the land. St. Thomas University electrical engineering and solar physics faculty agreed to work with local leaders to develop two projects that would provide sustainable energy to the area and train community members in the implementation, use, and maintenance of solar energy systems, while providing concrete research and learning opportunities for St. Thomas faculty and students.

Finding an Effective Model of Engagement

While criteria had been established and projects identified, there was still the problem of how to organize the university’s involvement in a way that would best utilize its limited resources. As noted earlier, St. Thomas is a small, inner-city university with very limited financial support. The university’s Center for Justice and Peace had only one staff member at the time, and no institutional funding was available to support the Haiti collaboration. Student academic engagement would also be a challenge: Over 55% of St. Thomas students came from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, many of
whom entered the university with weak high-
school preparation and worked second jobs
while studying (St. Thomas University, Office
of Institutional Research, 2011). The university
was both a predominantly African-decent and
Hispanic-decent serving institution, due to
the large Latin American, African American,
and Afro-Caribbean descent communities in
South Florida. How to engage such a diverse
student body, many of whose families had left
impoverished countries themselves, would be a
considerable challenge.

Similarly, the challenge of working in rural
Haiti was not taken lightly. Haiti has the second
largest number of NGOs per-capita in the world,
and yet has seen only modest gains in develop-
ment over the last 30 years (Ratnesar, 2011; Dou-
cet, 2011). As discussed earlier, the Northwest De-
partment has remained one of Haiti’s most isolat-
ed regions, and even the world’s largest NGOs
have been unable to effect substantive change
in the area. For a small university with such limited
resources, the challenge of making a significant
impact in the region would be a daunting task.

A decision was made early on to adopt a
community-based learning/engaged scholarship
approach to the partnership. While not all of
the project needs would fit into a traditional
research model (some would have specific
research questions, while others would involve
the production of sales models, business plans,
etc.), they would have the common thread of
using the university’s research and teaching to
meet the needs of the collaborative projects. At
St. Thomas, engaged scholarship would come to
be broadly defined as:

A structured academic partnership with
a local community in which faculty and
students: participate in an organized
activity that addresses needs identified by
the local community; learn from direct
interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with
others; and reflect on the experience in
such a way as to gain further understanding
of course content, a deeper appreciation of
global and intercultural issues, a broader
appreciation of the host country and the
discipline, and an enhanced sense of their
own responsibilities as citizens, locally and
globally. (Adapted from Bringle & Hatcher,
2011, p. 19).

The pedagogical benefits of such an engaged
research and learning process have been well
documented in the literature (Eyler & Giles,
1999, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Beyond
these academic benefits, however, utilizing such
an approach was also simply the most practical
decision given the reality of St. Thomas. Due to
heavy teaching loads and students’ competing
interests of work and school, both faculty
and student involvement in co-curricular
activities was very limited. Quite simply, it
was unrealistic to expect faculty or students to
commit significant time to projects outside their
academic commitment. Conversely, an approach
that could enhance faculty research and teaching,
while also providing students with credit, made
the projects more appealing to both parties (Eyler

As noted earlier, the collaboration was
strictly focused on one geographical region of
Haiti (the Diocese of Port-de-Paix), and within
this region it was focused on addressing the needs
of these three specific collaborative projects. The
hope was that focusing the university’s research
and teaching in such a targeted way would create
a deep (as opposed to wide) level of engagement,
and thus maximize community impact despite
the challenges.

A steering team called the “Global Solidarity
Committee” was formed to bring faculty, staff,
students, community-members, and Haitian
partners together to identify the long-term aims
of the overall initiative. From this larger group,
subcommittees were formed to (a) create goals and
objectives for each of the three projects, and (b)
oversee their ongoing implementation. Finally, a
scaffolding of five levels of university engagement
in the projects was envisioned, with the aim of
offering faculty and students different engagement
opportunities with differing levels of commitment
and responsibility. The hope was that this would
give faculty and students the chance to increase
their engagement incrementally throughout their
university career, while also offering a broad range
of resources to meet specific project needs (see
Martin, Bekken, & Poley, 2011). These five levels of
engagement were identified as: 1) faculty/student
community-based research projects; 2) intensive for-
credit internships; 3) full community-based learning
courses; 4) courses with a partial community-based
learning component; and 5) volunteer opportunities.
This model is roughly approximated in Figure 1.

The collaboration is still in development,
and not every level of engagement has been realized for each of the projects. That said, there has been significant progress, and this scaffolding of engagement levels has proven a useful way to organize the various community-based research and learning activities, while meeting the multiple needs of each of the projects. We will now turn to concrete examples of each level of engagement, and detail how it has served, and is serving, the development of the projects. While the following is true for all three of the projects’ implementation, for sake of brevity we will focus our attention on the coffee and artisan initiatives.

Examples of Project-Based Scaffolding

1. Faculty/Student Community-Based Research Projects

Faculty/student CBR projects played a key role in laying the foundation for much of the coffee and artisan projects’ implementation. The Cafe COCANO steering committee worked with a St. Thomas business/marketing faculty member to develop a multi-tiered CBR partnership with the farmers that would: (a) identify the cooperative’s strengths/weaknesses and support its organizational development; (b) identify the coffee varietals and consult with the farmers on U.S. and foreign market opportunities given Haiti’s unique coffee cultivation history; and (c) develop a large-scale CBR project to integrate St. Thomas academic research and course offerings in a way that would facilitate the import, roast, and distribution of the cooperative’s coffee in the United States.

Similarly, the Atelye Thevenet steering committee worked with business faculty and students to develop a multi-tiered CBR project/collaboration with the artisans that would: (a) identify a variety of artisanal market opportunities; (b) work in product development, pricing, and market/value niche; and (c) develop an import/sales structure to bring and market production goods in the United States.

The coffee team’s research showed that cooperatives in Haiti had historically failed when they were overly dependent on one export chain and source of support (Dunnington, 2001). A relationship was built with Pascucci Torrefazione, an Italian coffee roaster that would export to the European market, as well as Panther Coffee Roasters, a specialty coffee roaster in Miami.
that would work with the university in the U.S. market. Simultaneously, in collaboration with groups such as Catholic Relief Services and the Just Trade Center, technical assistance was provided to the cooperative to support its organization and production planning.

In order to bring the coffee to market, the coffee CBR team developed an integrated process where St. Thomas business students would work with the cooperative to directly import, roast, and sell the coffee in the United States. This would give hands-on learning opportunities to university business students in international trade, marketing and sales, while also increasing profits for the farmers of the region.

A similar process was designed by the artisan team, with art management students focusing on sales opportunities for the Haitian paintings, while other students focused on selling more traditional artisan goods through online and direct retail outlets.

A St. Thomas communications faculty member launched a CBR public relations/marketing team involving a number of undergraduate and graduate communications students. This team was divided into two subsections: one to integrate faculty/student marketing expertise with the research/production needs of the STU GSP projects (developing marketing and promotional materials for the coffee and artisan initiatives, creating websites, event notifications, etc.) and the other (called the “Blooming Hope” documentary project) to organize a CBR/production of a full length documentary highlighting the projects. Employing a participatory-action model, the work integrated faculty research, student learning, and community voice/partner development. The documentary’s release and distribution were planned to serve as a second CBR project focused on using the documentary as a tool for promoting sales/opening new markets in the United States, as well as promoting and building co-op participation in Haiti. This process inspired a St. Thomas doctoral dissertation focused on the transformational power of this collaborative filmmaking initiative (Moyano, 2011).

2. Intensive For-Credit Internships

Internships proved to be key to the development of the projects as well. Once the structures for both the coffee and artisan projects had been researched and developed (import processes, customs clearance, pricing, opportune sales markets, accounting mechanisms, etc.), interns were recruited to function as the core staff for the day-to-day operation of the projects. These students were generally business or communications students who, under the guidance of both the steering committee and a faculty advisor, planned the semestery activities of the projects, held sales events, generated reports on the sales, and consulted Haitian partners in the process. While not CBR in a traditional sense, the interns would face questions that needed to be addressed on a weekly basis, drawing on their academic resources to address these challenges.

These internships have become regular offerings at the university, and each year there are marketing, sales, and accounting interns from the university’s school of business who earn credit by integrating their learning into the coordination of sales, marketing, accounting, and inventory management of the coffee and artisan items. Similarly, a public relations intern is recruited from St. Thomas’s communications department every year to coordinate PR and media outreach for the projects, as well as to further the expansion of the documentary film initiative.

3. Full-Course Engagement

Early on, the steering committee also saw the opportunity to develop a three-credit course that would integrate the needs of the projects with student research and learning. An upper-division, interdisciplinary Social Entrepreneurship course based in the St. Thomas School of Business was soon developed. First offered in the spring of 2009, it continues to be offered today with an ever increasing number of student applicants (two sections of the course were needed to meet student demand in 2013 and 2014).

Students in the Social Entrepreneurship course study business management and development models that include a “double bottom line” of both profit and social-responsibility, while applying their learning to specific tasks needed by the coffee and artisan projects. The course incorporates faculty lecturers from disciplines as varied as communications, philosophy, economics, theology, environmental law, psychology, and management – all with the aim of giving a broad orientation to best practices in socially responsible enterprise.

Specific research questions or projects that can be completed in one semester are identified
for the course by the coffee and artisan steering committees. Students in the course then choose one of these issues and throughout the semester utilize their learning to address these issues and further the projects. Integrated into this process is the opportunity for students in the class to travel to Port-de-Paix to meet with their Haitian counterparts and complete project tasks that might require person-to-person contact or site-based work.

Many of the discreet next-steps of the projects have been completed in this way. For example, one year a student group researched socially responsible web design and applied this learning to the creation of a website for the coffee project. A group of students studying art management developed a project in which they researched pricing guidelines for the artisan paintings, while building relationships with local art galleries. Another group researched and helped expand artisan sales beyond handcrafts and into custom tote-bag production. Yet another group researched coffee grading techniques and prepared a report and classification system to aid the coffee farmers in their coffee sorting process. In each case, the community engagement projects were small but concrete, and integrated student learning with real project needs identified in collaboration with the Haitian partners.

4. Partial Course Engagement

There are also projects that do not require a full semester of research or student work but can still serve as a basic level of engagement and student learning. For example, sales events need informed staff, outreach efforts require a group of committed members, and partner meetings require Haitian Creole translation. In light of this, a number of courses were developed that provide faculty and students with an introductory level of information and engagement in the projects, while also meeting some of the projects’ basic needs.

For example, a philosophy professor teaching Introduction to Business Ethics expressed interest in orienting his students to the moral issues of international commodity trade. The GSP steering committee worked with the professor to redevelop his course with a new unit focused on coffee trade as an example of global commodity supply chains. Students in the class now study fair-trade and coffee as one of the world’s most-traded global commodities and then apply their learning through interactions (via Skype) with partners in the Café COCANO coffee project. The students are then offered the opportunity to work with the project at local coffee sales and promotional events.

Similarly, introductory courses in the St. Thomas School of Theology and Ministry have looked at ethical consumption from the perspective of Catholic social thought, with a specific focus on coffee as a common beverage of college students. After considering various trade models through the ethical lens of the Catholic tradition, students are offered the opportunity to take part in promotional events for the coffee project in the local Haitian Catholic community. Students then reflect and integrate their learning from this partnership in light of their experience and in-class study.

Other partial-engagement courses have included introductory level radio and film classes. In these courses students have taken on production of short public service announcements (PSAs) within the class. The PSAs give students the hands-on opportunity to integrate their learning about the projects with actual radio/film production, while also providing the projects with valuable PR materials to support sales. In each case, the engaged learning component is not the entire focus of the course, but it contributes to concrete student learning outcomes and builds needed support for the projects.

5. Volunteer Opportunities

Finally, volunteer opportunities have been integrated into the ongoing work of the projects. While these opportunities entail virtually no research, they have offered a first-step into the work for faculty and students who want to learn about the projects without academic credit or research commitment. Often this takes the form of simple coffee packaging or assisting in promotional sales events. If the volunteers express further interest, they are then encouraged to follow-up by working with the steering committee to find a connection between their teaching and research and the needs of the project (for faculty) or enrolling in a course that works in closer collaboration with the projects (for students).

This flexible, project-focused, multi-tiered model of engagement has been applied to each of the projects and has helped organize the engagement of the university in a way that brings faculty from a number of disciplines together,
offers multiple levels of engagement opportunities for students, and provides numerous resources to serve the various needs of the projects. While still in development, it has proven to be a helpful structure in organizing, and achieving, both academic learning and community impact.

Community Matters: Output, Outcomes, and Impact

In their recent work, Mary Beckman and her colleagues have introduced a framework for achieving community impact that includes three critical components: (1) commitment to a long-term process of change with a specific goal, (2) a process of evaluation and revision to stay focused on this goal, and (3) the involvement of multiple contributors, including the affected community, in this process (Beckman, Penney, & Cockburn, 2011). Though the STU GSP collaborations were not designed with this framework in mind, in many ways their implementation reflect these components: (1) the projects were developed with a commitment to long-term economic self-sufficiency in northwest Haiti, and with the specific goals of developing fair/direct-trade coffee and artisan import processes, as well as sustainable solar-energy initiatives; (2) the STU GSP steering committees kept the long-term goals in mind, clarifying research needs as they became apparent, and constantly evaluating and revising the projects’ direction in light of project results; and (3) the projects included multiple voices and input of faculty, students, community partners, and perhaps most essentially, the Haitian partners. In retrospect, it seems likely that these components were key in the project’s success to date.

In the same work, Beckman and her colleagues also make clear the importance of differentiating three stages in the community change process. These are: (a) outputs – referring to the initial results of a CBR/CBL initiative; (b) outcomes – referring to the effects of the application of the CBR/CBL results; and (c) impact – referring to the long-term contribution of this collaboration over time. While these categories were not used in the initial planning of the projects, they are useful to describe some of the planned, as well as some of the unforeseen, community changes that have come about as a result of the STU GSP collaboration. These will be briefly summarized below.

The Café COCANO Fair-Trade Coffee Project

Outcomes

- With university support, the COCANO cooperative created a functioning infrastructure for both coffee production and cooperative management that included space for expansion and collaboration with multiple export partners.
- Multiple technical assistance projects were created in collaboration with the university that brought in agronomists from Italy, Burundi, Brazil, and the United States to work with the cooperative in coffee cultivation and processing.
- A five-fold, interdisciplinary scaffolding model of engagement was developed to integrate St. Thomas business and communications students into the import, marketing, sales, and accounting of the coffee project.
- A faculty/student communications CBR team developed a full-length documentary, “Blooming Hope,” that was produced using a participatory-action/production model to promote the work of the Haitian partners.
- Coffee farmers in Haiti’s northwest are exporting coffee in a direct fair-trade partnership for the first time in history (see cafecocano.com, youtube.com/cafecocano, and www.facebook.com/cafecocano).
- Over 120,000 pounds of coffee have been exported by the cooperative in the last three years, with production growing significantly year-to-year.
- The cooperative is now earning $4.16/lb on exports to the United States – more than twice the current international fair-trade standards of $1.85/lb (Fairtrade International, 2014).
- Approximately 20 delegations from the university have traveled to Haiti to work on-site, and over 200 students have been involved in for-credit CBR/CBL activities connected to next steps on the projects.
- The National Association of Haitian Cooperatives has identified COCANO...
as a leading new cooperative in Haiti, and the Hudson Institute’s Index of Global Philanthropy highlighted the St. Thomas/Café COCANO collaboration as one of its projects of success in 2010 (Hudson Institute, 2010).

Impact

- Over 300 farmer-families, and close to 2000 individuals, are currently employed in the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of COCANO coffee in six areas of the Diocese of Port-de-Paix (La Croix, Guichard, Gaspard, Jean Claire, Anse-a-Fleur, and Ma Wouj).
- The cooperative has begun coffee nursery programs, with thousands of seedlings planted in what is, in effect, an economically incentivized reforestation effort for northwest Haiti.
- The cooperative provided employment to individuals displaced to northwest Haiti following the 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, thus supporting the much-needed decentralization of the Haitian economy (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010, 2012; Stevens & St. Hubert, 2010; Ministry of the Interior of Haiti, 2011).
- In response to the 2010–2011 cholera epidemic, the cooperative saved hundreds of lives by organizing its own relief efforts in the remote northwest mountains, essentially functioning as an independent relief organization in areas not served by foreign NGOs (MSPP & WHO, 2011; St. Hubert, 2011).
- The cooperative has taken on increasing responsibility as a conduit between coffee farmers and the Haitian government, thus supporting the development of social capital in its members, and further strengthening its role as a functioning unit of civil society (Froehle, 2013).

The Ateyle Thevenet Artisan Initiative

Outputs

- The same five-fold, interdisciplinary scaffolding of engagement opportunities was created to integrate student research and learning with the import, marketing, and sales of hand-made artisan crafts in the United States.
- The Haitian artisans’ workshop was strengthened and developed into a formal atelier (studio) production unit and three-year training facility to develop future artisans in the community.
- Business models, including pricing indices based on market standards, were developed to aid planning for future sales.
- New artisan items such as high-quality, hand-crafted, custom tote-bags were developed in a collaboration between student market-research efforts and the atelier’s own artisan training staff.

Outcomes

- The first large scale fair-trade artisan project has been established between Port-de-Paix and the United States (see www.haitiartisancrafts.com).
- Over $65,000 worth of Haitian artisan products have been sold in the United States.
- Over 200 women in five artisan centers have been employed throughout Haiti’s Northwest Department (Bombardopolis, Jean-Rabel, St. Louis du Nord, Bonneau, and Anse a Fleur).

Impact

- After the 2010 earthquake, like the coffee cooperative, the artisan cooperative played an important role in absorbing displaced individuals into the local economy of Haiti’s northwest.
- Beyond simply a source of employment, the artisan cooperative has come to serve as a source of technical educational in its community, and a forum for addressing local women’s issues.
- The artisan cooperative has begun a new initiative to support women who have graduated from the co-op and gone on to start their own businesses.

The St. Thomas/Port-de-Paix Solar Energy Initiative

Outputs

- With university support, a large-scale solar oven was implemented in the poorest parish of the Northwest Department to cook for the community school without the need for charcoal.
- A collaboration was created with Haiti
Tec (a technical training school in Port-au-Prince) to work with the university and the Cathedral of Port-de-Paix in the design and implementation of a 10kw solar energy system for the Cathedral and community center of the region.

- A steering committee was created with St. Thomas physics/solar energy faculty, electrical engineering students, and community electricians to work with the Haitian partners in researching and developing the appropriate technology for the community’s needs.

**Outcomes**

- Three-hundred school children in Baie-de-Henne – the poorest, most deforested parish of Port-de-Paix – are currently fed by a large solar oven provided by the collaboration.
- A 10kw solar energy system for the Cathedral of Port-de-Paix has been designed and installed by the St. Thomas/Haiti Tec solar team in collaboration with community leaders in Port-de-Paix.

**Impact**

- The solar oven in Baie-de-Henne is supporting sustainable cooking methods, while raising awareness about charcoal/tree conservation in one of Haiti’s most critically deforested areas.
- The Cathedral of Port-de-Paix solar project is providing light to thousands who come to this key community center in the capital of the northwest region, offsetting 12,479 pounds of CO2 pollution annually and has provided hands-on learning experiences for St. Thomas and Haiti Tec students, as well as for the local Haitian electricians trained during the process in Port-de-Paix.
- Haiti Tec partners, already commissioned by the Haitian government to develop electrical codes for the country, have received a level of training in international standards that they had not previously received working only with domestic partners.

For all three projects, it has been the development of the Haitian community’s capacity to (1) define its own problems, (2) create its own solutions, and (3) implement its own plans that the university partners have seen as most promising in terms of a contribution to long-term, sustainable development for the region.

**Lessons Learned and Areas for Growth**

The positive experience of the STU GSP collaboration to date suggests that three main lessons can be learned from the university’s partnership in Haiti:

1. A geographically centered, community-led, project-focused collaboration can help maximize benefit for both partners, as university resources are optimized, local leadership is empowered, long-term collaborative relationships develop, and impact (both community and student) synergize.
2. Engaging individual projects from multiple disciplines adds breadth to student learning, increases faculty interaction, and increases impact by providing multiple resources to meet project needs.
3. Offering a scaffolding of engagement levels provides pathways to engagement for faculty/students at different points in their career, while also meeting multiple project needs (from research questions, to day-to-day operations, to one-time volunteers, etc.)

Though there has been significant success, a number of weaknesses/areas for growth have been identified by the project partners:

A. Ongoing funding has been a challenge for the project, as many funders focus their support either on internationally based development operations or domestic higher-educational initiatives, but do not have a category for projects that integrate the latter with the former.

B. Use of standardized logic models that visually map out required resources (inputs), activities to take place (processes), assessable outputs, and desired outcomes is quickly becoming a best-practice in university-community engagement planning. While logic models had not been historically used by the STU GSP teams, in 2013–2014 the project committees began using such models with their partners to map out ideal (1) community impact outcomes, (2) academic
learning outcomes, and (3) civic learning outcomes for each of the five levels of project engagement (Howard, 2001; Finley, 2013).

C. Standardized assessment of each of the three principal outcome areas mentioned above (community impact, academic learning, and civic learning) is a future goal as the projects aim to take their efforts to an even higher level of accountability and efficacy.

While the results of the above changes remain to be seen, the hope is that a more structured planning and assessment process will enhance long term the impact of the collaborations, both for the university and the community.

Conclusion

As programs of engaged scholarship become more widespread, universities will continue to consider how they can use their limited resources to maximize community impact while offering a variety of meaningful community-based research and learning opportunities for faculty and students. The St. Thomas University/Port-de-Paix Global Solidarity Partnership was born out of just such an effort to leverage the minimal resources of a small, urban, Catholic university into long-term development in one of the Western Hemisphere’s poorest regions. While the programs are still young, the experience so far suggests that significant impact can be attained by adopting a model that is geographically centered, community-led, project-focused, interdisciplinary and utilizes a multi-tiered scaffolding of engagement opportunities to address the varied needs of the university-community initiative.

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Anthony Vinciguerra walks with children at the site of STU GSP solar oven initiative in Baie-de-Henne, Haiti.

Emmanuel Buteau, St. Thomas doctoral student, speaks with COCANO coffee farmers (from left) Petit Frere Lafontant, Eliecoer Beaubrun, and Ferdinand Louis in San Louis du Nord, Haiti.
“We Know We Are Doing Something Good, But What Is It?”: The Challenge of Negotiating Between Service Delivery and Research in a CBPR Project

Fay Fletcher, Brent Hammer, and Alicia Hibbert

Abstract

Engaging communities throughout the research process and responding to community priorities results in constant negotiation between service and research. Community-based participatory research has well-established principles intended to guide both the process and goals of research with community. The authors contribute to the body of literature that speaks to the challenge of achieving CBPR ideals amidst the complexity of community realities. When university-based research is aligned with community-based service delivery, at least three sets of expectations must be balanced - those of the community, the university, and the funding agency. The complexity of achieving balance between the ideal and the reality of CBPR, and balance between service delivery and research, were explored using a cyclical process of debriefs throughout the delivery of a youth life skills program with Métis Settlements in Alberta. The value of the process and lessons learned are presented.

The phrase “scholarship of engagement” (SOE) represents an emergent and therefore somewhat nebulous concept in the current domains of higher education and community-university partnerships (Driscoll & Sandmann, 2001; Giles, 2009). Not to be mistaken for “engaged scholarship” (ES), now ensconced in community-university partnerships (CUP) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) literature (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005; Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009), the intent of SOE is to represent a reflection on the process of doing ES. Since Ernest Boyer (1990, 1996) described his vision of SOE, there has been a tendency over the past two decades for researchers and academics to get bogged down in terminology while trying to reconcile the study of ES and SOE (Giles, 2008) with the ideals of CUP (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005) and guiding principles for conducting CBPR that supports collaborative, equitable partnerships that involve long-term process and commitment (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Israeli, Schulz, Paarker, Allen, & Guzman, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to report on an approach for SOE research. The authors present a formative evaluation process designed to document the challenges of developing, delivering, and managing a community service delivery program while balancing the goal of and institutional expectation for academic research rigor. The process and outcomes are explored through discussions of complex issues and events during a CBPR project entitled Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey (MSLSJ). We further explore the challenge of balancing the ideas, guidelines, and rhetoric of research literature with the lived experiences of community partners and research participants.

Whether delivering a community service program or conducting a program evaluation, working with, not for, the community remains a priority in CBPR (Wallerstein, Duran, Minckler, & Foley, 2005). Ongoing multi-dimensional communication and relationship building are recognized as key components to effective CBPR projects (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998, 2001); yet they also remain at odds with funders’ goals of producing quantifiable results in a timely fashion and academic institutional policies for rewarding achievement (Driscoll & Sandman, 2001; Horowitz, et al., 2009). Academia and project funders largely undervalue sustainable working relationships as outcomes in CBPR projects in general (Shaffer, 2014).

This article explores how a CBPR research team strives to maintain academic rigor in a health oriented CBPR project while addressing the multitude of variables in working directly with people and communities, for example:

You wonder how authentic the engage-
ment is when, in order to meet the academic rigor as they define it, they can’t be responsive to community priorities and community realities in terms of development. So it’s very complicated, right? How do you actually gauge a relationship being authentic and enforce academic rigor that this measures? (principal investigator)

CBPR, CUP, and ES literature clearly articulate their respective principles, in theory (Horowitz, et al., 2009; Israel, et al., 2001; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009). However, in practice, delivering a program with community members and conducting research shaped by their everyday experiences did not fit into prescribed principles and theories. CBPR requires a balance between the ideal and real, and often constant negotiation between service and research. To manage this balance, we created an opportunity to understand the tensions and to garner insight into engagement and capacity building.

Regular debrief sessions were held with the principal investigator (PI), project manager (PM), and research coordinator (RC) at the request of the PI of the MSLSJ project. The motivation came from the PI’s experience across multiple projects where “the elephant in the room” was ignored: politics, power, and prevailing stereotypes that many scholars are uncomfortable addressing. The PI shared the hope that debrief participants would commit to an environment where these issues could be openly discussed. The purpose of these debrief sessions was twofold: first, to provide an information-sharing forum for team leaders during MSLSJ implementation, and second, to provide an opportunity for reflection and reflexive analysis, similar to academic journal writing, now encouraged as a part of performing engaged scholarship. Insights gained from this process would be used as formative assessment and to inform planning. Three team leaders, referred to here as participants, debriefed regularly on the ongoing challenges of negotiating between service delivery and research.

While the participants recognize that the statement “we are doing something good” may not satisfy the rigor of academic research, the phrase speaks to the need for a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics needed to achieve success in both service delivery and research. There is growing acceptance in community engagement studies of the value in collecting stories to shape positive change in communities (Romero, 2013). The participants and facilitator chose an approach that involved collecting and reflecting on personal CBPR research stories through cycles of active participation in debriefs by the research team leaders. The process, lessons learned, and outcomes provide insight into the “elephants in the room,” expediting progress from CBPR principles to action and reflection on common pitfalls in engagement. This paper contributes to the emerging body of literature on SOE.

**Project Background and Partners**

The primary purpose of the MSLSJ program is to increase life skills awareness in a culturally appropriate manner, with the intent of addressing substance misuse and bullying in Métis communities. The MSLSJ program meets the community’s goal of incorporating their specific community context in programming and meets the goal of funders to foster safe communities through prevention programs in Alberta, enhance the wellness of Alberta’s children and families, and provide skill training for Aboriginal youth. The project employs an interdisciplinary approach by engaging individuals with expertise in education, psychology, recreation and physical education, anthropology, nutritional sciences, and community engagement studies to work with members of the Métis Settlements involved in the project.

The Métis are an Aboriginal group in Canada, some living on self-governed settlements in Alberta. While the Métis have a shared history with First Nations people, they are a distinct group with different lived realities from First Nations communities. The MSLSJ program is part of a Métis settlement research project that builds partnerships with individual settlements and focuses on knowledge exchange with settlement members.

The PI has been collaborating with Aboriginal communities in CBPR projects since 2005 (Baydala, Sewlal, Rasmussen, Alexis, Fletcher, Letendre, Odishaw, Kennedy, & Kootenay, 2009; Baydala, Letendre, Rutten, Worrell, Fletcher. Letendre, & Schramm, 2011; Baydala, Worrell, Fletcher, Letendre, Letendre, & Rutten, 2013), supported by the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Extension. Participating authors Fletcher and Hibbert, along with Robertson and Asselin (2013), published on community engagement studies of the value in collecting stories to shape positive change in communities (Romero, 2013). The participants and facilitator chose an approach that involved collecting and reflecting on personal CBPR research stories through cycles of active participation in debriefs by the research team leaders. The process, lessons learned, and outcomes provide insight into the “elephants in the room,” expediting progress from CBPR principles to action and reflection on common pitfalls in engagement. This paper contributes to the emerging body of literature on SOE.
through needs assessments as part of this ongoing project.

**Documenting Engagement: Meshing Methods in Debrief Sessions**

The PI initiated weekly debrief sessions as a way to monitor the progress of the MSLSJ project and to provide a forum for reflection on the process of CUP required for engaged scholarship in CBPR projects. This approach follows a simple, yet effective, principle that the people who are doing the work should also reflect upon it (Smyth, 1989). This supports the current movement of academic institutions and faculty professing engaged learning, discovery, and citizenship to demonstrate their public engagement and contribute to the SOE (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002;布鲁卡特,荷兰,佩里, &齐默尔, 2004; Faculty of Extension, 2010; Stanton, 2007). The fact that the participants had taken separate academic journeys but had collectively studied critical social theory, cultural relativism, and reflexivity, led to a shared belief in the importance of creating space for multiple perspectives to inform the research process. It was agreed that journaling provided a valuable experiential learning method for exploring engagement in CUP and CBPR (Douchet & Wilson, 2008). Despite this interest, the time commitment required was impractical, especially during camp leader training and implementation. To overcome the barrier presented by this time demand, it was decided that audio recorded sessions would fill this need. The debrief sessions were used as an alternative approach to journaling; dialogue would encourage active and critical reflection. The debrief process complemented other quantitative and qualitative data collection and evaluation pieces already in place for the overall project.

The term “debrief” was selected for this process, representing an informal sharing activity unconstrained by narrow labels. Similar to the First Nations idea of a sharing circle, the debrief activity fit with the perspective of CBPR being an approach to, rather than a specific research method for, evaluating research outcomes.

**The Approach: Cooperative Inquiry**

Traditional qualitative methods alone would have been insufficient to meet the goals set by the participants – to explore the “elephants in the room” and document the balance between service delivery and research. Cooperative inquiry stems from action research, participatory research, feminist qualitative research, and appreciative inquiry; it was chosen as the debrief approach since it allows for reflective practice and analysis (Heron, 1996). The data collection methods align with the co-operative inquiry approach, emphasizing reflective practice.

**Methods: Delbrief Sessions**

A doctoral student with experience in qualitative data collection, interviewing, and focus groups was hired to facilitate the debrief sessions. The student was not employed by the Faculty of Extension, was not a project team leader, and was not a member of the Métis Settlement. This enabled the debrief facilitator to assume an outsider’s perspective during discussion of this particular project. However, the student had a shared set of values with the participants; his background was also entrenched in the principles of cultural relativism and reflexivity, a key factor in his ability to facilitate the conversation with this group. The student also had experience working with the participants and was able to meet the expectation for safe and open discussions based on a well established level of familiarity and trust.

The debrief sessions were not conducted using traditional interview or focus group protocol. A typical interview process requires non-reaction from the interviewer, so it is important to note that the debrief facilitator did not maintain a strict interviewer-interviewee relationship with the participants. The lack of structure for these discussions also negates its categorization as a focus group.

In practice, the debrief sessions incorporated many elements of unstructured reflective journaling, which can be audio recorded, as well as autoethnography. In parallel to the goals of unstructured reflective journaling, these sessions involved researchers discussing their experiences, assumptions, and choices throughout the research process, integrating new ideas into daily activities. The group process used during debriefs introduced participants to the elements of co-operative inquiry:

> Cooperative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it (Heron, 1996, p. 1).

This blend of oral reflective journaling and co-operative inquiry during the debrief sessions satisfied our goal to be informal in our approach.
and to promote ease and comfort among the participants so that practical issues could be discussed. Creating a relaxed and safe environment encourages honesty and the open exchange of concerns, issues, and new ideas. The sessions were unstructured, allowing participants to provide regular updates to one another and to discuss emerging project issues. At the same time, the facilitator had participants focus on recurring themes. It is important to note that the position of the facilitator, who was familiar with the issues and research approach but not directly involved with the project, proved to be a valuable asset to the process and outcomes. Detailed clarification on actions, issues, strategies, and resolutions was achieved by asking who, why, and how questions of participants. These probes promoted intra-group communication and encouraged personal reflection by participants.

On average, the debrief sessions lasted one hour with a range of 43 to 67 minutes. All sessions were voice recorded to document both the discussion content and process. The facilitator uploaded the voice recorded sessions to a secure computer and transcribed them for further analysis. The following debrief summaries were filed with all project documents, ensuring that they would be readily accessible for knowledge mobilization activities, including reports to funders, research publications, and community presentations.

In order to further contribute to the project’s formative evaluation, the debrief summaries were then analyzed using an inductive qualitative approach in order to identify emerging themes (Thomas, 2006). Seven non-mutually exclusive themes were identified: community service delivery (or project management) vs. research; relationship building; roles and responsibilities; assumptions; youth facilitator training; staff hired to train the facilitators in their camp leader roles; and success of the first year. In total, 16 debriefs were held from May 8 to November 7, 2013, allowing participants to reflect on the entire pilot implementation process. This period encompassed facilitator training and implementation for two life skills summer camp programs for 7–10 year olds at two Métis Settlements in Alberta. The debrief session time period also included discussions about program evaluation through pre/post camp surveys with the campers, focus groups with campers and youth facilitators, and interviews with key team members involved in the delivery of these programs. At the conclusion of the debrief sessions in November, the three participants were asked to write their own summary and reflection on the process and submit it to the debrief facilitator. This was done to provide a summative evaluation sample with the goal of informing the overall formative process and future program planning.

**Emergent Theme: Balancing the Ideals of CBPR with the Realities of CBPR**

Community capacity building has been one of the guiding principles of CBPR and community-engaged scholarship (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001; Jones & Pomeroy, 2009). Chino and DeBruyn (2006) note that the concepts and terms of CBPR, including capacity building, are brought to Indigenous communities by mainstream academics and call for an indigenous informed approach. In response, the authors of this article have adopted the term co-learning, feeling it abandons a deficit based approach and more adequately captures the “important component of research among Native American communities” (LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009, p. 8) that recognizes individual expertise and community strength. The following comment
from the first debrief session illustrates the tension created by the language of capacity building versus co-learning, a tension that has ripple effects on the CBPR ideal of equal community involvement and participation throughout the project:

Yes, there are principles that are supposed to guide your work and your actions, right? And we’ve already, in working up to this point said, you know what? It’s not reasonable to expect everyone to contribute to every aspect and we’re going to use all our strengths and bring all our strengths together in the best way. What’s interesting is the idea of building capacity in individuals is enviable but to do so without patronizing is challenging. (PI)

This passage highlights a potentially problematic assumption in conducting CBPR, and one that researchers are often hesitant to openly discuss and report on: that the community and its members will actively engage in every aspect of the project. As the research team identified in their needs and readiness assessment (Fletcher et al., 2013), it is often difficult to get community members to participate in focus groups designed to collect their input and engage them in a collaborative process. While it is important to obtain Settlement Council’s support for the program, they are not the individuals in the community that are tasked to do the everyday work required for the project to be successful. Council may support the project in their community but the level of commitment and the capacity to participate may not be the same for the community members involved in the day-to-day activities.

The research team reduced the responsibilities of individual community members, especially volunteers, by acting as the central project managers tasked with the day-to-day administration and serving as the buffer between the university and funding institutions. While, ideally, CBPR seeks to incorporate community input into all phases of a project, that breadth of input can be difficult to motivate; the project management team is required to move forward based on what they do know, as the following quote suggests: “You can try to call meetings to gather input [into these] and if you get it that’s great but if you don’t, your only option is to do it based on what you know from your community relationships.” (PI) This illustrates that some communities, although they are aware of the issues and may provide strategies, are also overwhelmed by day-to-day responsibilities, or may not (yet) see the important and valuable insight they may contribute to resolving specific issues.

The debrief sessions revealed that community stakeholders were not interested in taking on particular tasks often associated with capacity-building (as well as the distribution of power), such as handling budgets and reporting or taking on supervision of co-workers in community. Furthermore, community members appreciated having people with the appropriate expertise to take on responsibility for some of these administrative and supervisory tasks. One debrief participant shared that community members she spoke with were “happy to have people from the [university], or wherever, who have expertise in certain areas to come out during camp and lead camp, that would be fine.” (PM) The PI reinforced this position in a later debrief session, stating:

This group has strongly said if you can bring someone from outside the community that has the skills, they actually encouraged that. And we can see that as now we are doing this two-way capacity building, we’re not being isolationists; we’re saying we have strengths as non-community folks that we can bring in.

The PI noted that this experience with the Métis Settlements was distinct from earlier experiences; they exhibited a keen willingness to have “outsiders” enter their community to assist in roles that members knew they did not have the expertise or desire to perform. A community member employed by the project reiterated this when she shared her belief that if a community is serious about change among their youth, they need to be willing to work positively with external partners. The team leaders were more comfortable with the decision to bring additional non-community employees to the project knowing that the community not only encouraged it, but also began to see themselves as mentors to university students, who would have an opportunity to learn about their communities. We were gradually coming to a shared and clear commitment to co-learning between not just the research
team but between settlement and post-secondary youth.

The excerpts from debriefs highlight the importance of building relationships through a process of co-learning that takes place over time. Time allows us to recognize the assets that individuals can contribute to the shared goal. It may be less about addressing perceived deficits in capacity and more about building social infrastructure, as the PI said: “Building capacity isn’t [only] building the skills in the community but the relationships and the networks.”

**Emerging Theme: Community Service Delivery vs. Research**

Inductive analysis confirmed a challenge apparent early in the debrief sessions: the complexity of managing a project that encompasses the creation, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of a community service while upholding the expectations of a research intensive university and multiple funding agencies. Despite the growing recognition of CBPR (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2008), priority given to connecting scholarship to the pressing issues and concerns of communities (Barker, 2004; Sandmann, 2006), and expectations for community university collaboration (Community Campus Partnerships for Health, n.d.; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, n.d.), the structures intended to serve the research mandate of the university do not easily accommodate service delivery or attend to the realities of the community. As a result, CBPR researchers often find themselves in the difficult position of satisfying both community priorities and university and funders’ policies. For example, the primary focus of the team leaders was to develop and implement – with community input – a program that would have a positive impact, making use of funding for the maximum benefit to the community. This is the direct result of a research team, representing community and university, that has achieved a similar understanding of community university engagement. The program must fit the needs of the community first, not the research goals of the university. To better understand some of the challenges of negotiating between service delivery and the research goals experienced, we present in more detail two ongoing foci of negotiation to achieve a balance of service and research: 1) barriers created by institutional (university and funding agency) policies and procedures, and 2) communication barriers created by language use and terminology.

**Barriers Created by Institutional Policies and Procedures**

The financial agreement between the funder and the PI’s institution was spoken of in 12 of the 16 debriefs, making it the most frequent topic of discussion. This speaks to its significance in achieving both the service delivery and research goals of the project. Openly discussing barriers that result from the policies and procedures of researchers’ institutions or funding agencies may be considered risky for researchers whose livelihood and reputation rely on funding to conduct research. Jeopardizing those grants or approvals by speaking about the challenges they present is not done lightly. However, the lessons learned in doing so may be the difference between future success or failure in maintaining community engagement while meeting community expectations for service delivery and adhering to the principles of CBPR.

The community service delivery side of the project required funds to pay for community facilitator training, summer camp supplies, community transportation, and food services. Project funding was also required to hire community members as staff to assist in the development of the program content and graduate research assistants to complete data collection, evaluation, and analysis.

By the 12th debrief, the summer camp program was complete and research data collected, yet the primary source of funding had not been secured with a signed contract. The ongoing challenges and subsequent success of managing the facilitator training and running the summer camps speak to the creativity and hard work from the project team leaders to essentially complete the first nine months of a 12-month agreement before money was transferred from the funder. It also speaks to the extra time, energy, and stress that was required to manage and successfully deliver a community service project, “If we didn’t have these funding issues, my [goodness] our lives would be so easy.” (PC) It is worth noting that this comment came from the first debrief session and not the 12th.

Were it not for interim funding provided by the PI’s faculty while agreements were written and re-written, all the activities needed to maintain the community trust and project mo-
mentum would have been interrupted. When so much time is invested in overcoming historical mistrust, the ability to support activities the community has prioritized (service programs) that also have a research and evaluation component is critical. The potential negative impacts of extremely delayed sign-off of contracts and agreements are a serious threat to successful engagement and CBPR.

The difficulty in signing agreements stemmed from the fact that the funding priority was service delivery, but the credibility and evaluative expertise the university brought to the project was valued by the funder. As a result, the principal funding agency used a service delivery template for the agreement. In short, this contract implied that the project team from the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Extension was providing a service program to the community and that the funder would “own” the program and any and all data generated from that program. Being a research-intensive post secondary institute, the University of Alberta office responsible for research contracts and agreements identified a number of issues regarding intellectual property and ownership. This arrangement would prove unacceptable to the PI and the university as it undermined the research relationship with the community as well as the university’s policies on intellectual property. More importantly, it undermines one of the key tenets of CBPR with Aboriginal people (retaining ownership and control of research outputs) and the decision by the community to make resources open access for settlements throughout Alberta.

The grant agreement reflected funding for service delivery rather than a research program; the intent of the project team was to receive funds for both elements. This again highlights the challenges of delivering a community service program with the research objectives and parameters of university and funder guidelines. The individuals involved in writing legal grant agreements have no social connection to the people involved in the proposed projects. Their obligation is to meet the legal requirements for the institutions they represent. Health care funders and universities are increasingly recognizing the value of qualitative research to long term health benefits for a community. Yet, this example illustrates how funding agencies and communities are often not on the same page. Many of the challenges and frustrations from the first year (tight timelines, training new staff, finding team members with the desired expertise, communication issues, making assumptions, limiting travel to the community, learning on the go) were acknowledged by the team leaders as arising from delays in securing a contract with the primary funder. “The more that we can get funding settled, the more I don’t have to be constantly worried about it.” (PM) Despite these uncertainties and frustration with the funding contract delays, the frequency of their discussion in the debrief sessions allowed the participants to develop a sense of humor around them, “We already think it’s hilarious that we have completely done year one of the program without money.” (PC) A sense of humor, while not on the checklist for professorial evaluation, comes in handy when engaging with community in CBPR projects.

You Say Potato, I Say Potáto: Language Use and Terminology

CBPR is an approach designed to bridge the gap between university and community. This includes the challenge of straddling two linguistic worlds. The terms theory of change, most significant change, outcome mapping, community-university partnerships, engaged scholarship, scholarship of engagement, and their acronyms TOC, MOC, OM, CUP, ES, SOE, considered useful in scholarly publications and academic discussions, have little or no relevance to community members. The project team learned to listen and speak in different languages: the language of the community (regardless of linguistic dialect) and the language of academia. While labels and terms as noted above may serve to position the researcher as expert in the project, they are unlikely to foster community engagement and may, in contrast, alienate community partners. Establishing a common language in CBPR is fundamental to respectful and equitable relationships. The language used to engage community members, like the project itself, must be relevant to the community.

In addition, the full complement of the team represented a variety of academic disciplines, also notorious for promoting their own terminology as part of their distinct expertise. Negotiating the service delivery/research balance as well as interdisciplinarity requires finding a common or shared communication style, language use, and terminology.

The community service delivery contract also used the troubling term “clients” to describe
community members participating in the various facets of the project:

... they always want to list clients, like on the report, how many clients did you affect. The new funding ... we’re not a research project but kind of a service - they are still listed as clients. So at some point I have to report on our clients and what we have done with them. (PM)

To combat this, reports to funders typically contain the terms “participants” for research participants and “partners” for all other community members involved in the project. We strictly avoid the use of the term “clients” in all reports, publications, and presentations, and have not to date received any backlash for doing so.

Regular debrief sessions over the duration of the MSLSJ development and delivery enabled the team leaders to discuss communication issues early and implement immediate corrective measures for community members as well as the expanded program service delivery and research team. Agreeing on accessible terms and labels, and clarifying their meanings, contributes to open communication.

Conversely, data, information, findings, interpretations, and meaning are often not readily accepted in academic circles and publications until given a discipline-accepted label. As the title of this paper – “We know we are doing something good, but what is it?” – is meant to suggest, the struggle to find an appropriate label to capture the first year experiences of the project is at the heart of negotiating a service delivery program with research objectives in a CBPR project. More succinctly, how do you measure the value of the relationships built and the deep meaning conveyed by those relationships? Through regular debriefs, participants, discussed, debated, and reflected on the many issues that arose during the first year of the project and received feedback on their individual activities on a regular basis. Lessons learned while the project was ongoing allowed for adjustments without affecting the research integrity of the overall project, “So we’re doing this constant formative evaluation with a very participatory approach.” (PI)

Lessons Learned

One of the first lessons was the importance of adopting a “learn as you go” attitude when engaging with communities in CBPR projects. As a result, in the discussion that follows, we have chosen to present an example, followed by the lesson learned and then a suggested way to meet the guidelines of CBPR. As managers of service delivery and researchers, you need to be open and adaptable to inter- and intra-community differences and politics and not be overwhelmed when the ideals of CBPR are unattainable. Even the most basic assumptions require more attention than originally planned for. For example, there was an assumption that community members who applied in response to a job posting for camp facilitator positions would understand that a) they would be responsible for teaching children basic life skills in a day camp setting and b) the commitment was to full time work from May through August. Early recognition of differing expectations regarding roles and responsibilities allowed for change to be implemented quickly. For example, schedules were adjusted to accommodate shorter work days and four-day work weeks, rules were set regarding the use of personal cell phone during work time, and more in depth discussions of their role as camp facilitator were incorporated in the training.

Despite extensive CBPR experience with communities believed to have similar dynamics, it was impossible to anticipate how assumptions shaped by previous experiences would be “tested.” In other words, every service delivery and research project will test what we think we know. As we became more familiar with the community members and community dynamics, it was clear that research questions and methods should be revised to get to the root of the challenges faced in delivering the life skills program. We also took in stride the unpredictability of participant attendance and adjusted data collection methods – down to the number of evaluation assistants present and physical location of the children in groups – as required. Flexibility and the ability to improvise on the go are essential skills in this work, as well as the ability to think innovatively about conventional principles of CBPR. Facilitators, being community members, knew the children and brought community knowledge and unique expertise. They also recognized themselves that they did not have the depth of expertise to handle everything that occurred at camp and welcomed more outside supervision from the university team members. The regular debrief sessions allowed the team leaders to address these
types of issues immediately, assess the options, and take immediate action as required. This process encouraged creative solutions to specific issues while reducing the burden of individual team members having to make quick decisions on their own.

A second key lesson had to do with the assumptions regarding the composition and size of research team required to achieve the service delivery and research goals. The MSLSJ program proved too complex and multi-layered for the team leaders to manage all details. Subject matter experts from physical education and recreation were hired to give community facilitators the skills and knowledge to teach life skills through play. Research assistants were hired to assist in data collection and analysis. However, hiring undergraduate and graduate students with different disciplinary backgrounds meant that not all of the team members were familiar with the fundamental principles of CBPR and community engagement. This lack of grounding in CBPR is reflected in this comment:

I think the naivete of people entering into community based work [without prior experience] and thinking that - it kind of sounded like we were doing transactional community engagement. It was revealing of a lack of understanding possibly and newness to...community based research. (PI)

Co-learning and relationship building among the academic research team deserves as much attention as is given to co-learning and relationship building between the university and the community. Being self-reflective and analytical, while not always a comfortable process, has proven to be essential to serving the needs of the overall project and community partners.

Timely summaries of the debrief sessions enabled the PM to consider lessons learned while in the midst of planning the next year’s program budget and schedule. For example, the following decisions were made with regard to:

1. Project Management
   a. training should occur in the communities
   b. the PC will teach facilitators, linking life skills concepts and activities
   c. we will hire a camp director who is responsible for supervising facilitators
   d. recruitment will be revised to strengthen the hiring of facilitators
   e. we will enforce clear expectations and consequences for facilitator performance

2. Research
   a. participant observation during the summer camps would be valuable
   b. if we feel that a relationship with a partner is weak (based on our understanding of community readiness), the program will not run with that community
   c. outside guests make camp more fun, so plan for more to participate
   d. facilitators would benefit from a peer mentorship design with university students
   e. project outcomes could be improved if all members of the team, facilitators in particular, were taught basic principles of CBPR and the project goals

By discussing and reflecting on the program activities while they were happening, the team leaders came to recognize the importance of identifying the daily small ripples of change which could lead to more significant stories of change for future research purposes. They also learned to be realistic in their expectations for the project such as expecting only small ripples of change in the children after a two week summer camp. Teaching life skills and building resiliency is a long term project. It is also impossible to plan for all contingencies when engaged in community-based projects. The significance of using the debriefs to learn lessons is echoed in this statement by the PI: “Well, it informs what we are going to do for next year; definitely it’s changing our strategy and plan for next year.” Subsequent implementation years would have higher quality due to these lessons learned through debrief sessions.

Moving Forward
Regular debrief sessions were acknowledged by the team leaders as a more comfortable and efficient method for reflective analysis than individual journaling; they allow for a place and time to vent frustrations and brainstorm solutions.
They were an opportunity to confront assumptions and challenge ideologies and practices, some of those “elephants in the room” that are often not discussed and documented. They were a successful strategy for documenting process and insights for future reference. “So often conversations happen and they are totally forgotten. Like a year from now, some of them [the same issues] will be happening again.” (PI)

The debriefs were a way to recognize and celebrate the many small successes that occurred, sometimes on a daily basis. The regular acknowledgement of positive events or moments served as validation to the team leaders that they were “doing something good” and provided motivation to continue to move forward despite the challenges of balancing a community service delivery program with the rigors of research objectives. This reinforced the idea that motivation should be one of the shared goals for the project and that helping to motivate community members, to see the value of the changes they wish to make in their community, is a critical component of co-learning. Capacity is built by creating networks for community members to use once the university exits the community; simply running the summer camps could build relationships in the community.

The debriefs were an effective way to promote regular information updates, to collect data for formative assessments of the program delivery and research, and to test the potential of co-operative inquiry as a novel and valuable tool for ES and SOE:

You do need to lay out your questions and your methods, all of those pieces that create academic rigor that people are looking for. But we are really trying to explore those other aspects of doing this work that are about the engagement and that do allow the work to make a difference... That’s the real richness in these [debriefs]. (PI)

The debrief process was a positive experience for participants and contributed to the overall project goals. The team will use the debrief process for the second year of program implementation and evaluation. In addition, a community team member will join the team leaders debriefs and separate debriefs will be held with camp facilitators. The expansion of this debrief approach in our own engaged scholarship and scholarship of engagement is increasingly plausible as the relationship with individuals from the community and the community as a whole strengthens.

References


About the Authors

All three authors are with the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Fay Fletcher is an associate professor and academic director of Community Engagement Studies, Brent Hammer is a doctoral candidate and graduate research assistant, and Alicia Hibbert is a research project manager.
In the past 20 years, colleges and universities have worked more aggressively to engage students in community-based partnerships aimed at facilitating racial and cultural understanding and at helping students gain a sense of civic engagement (Buch & Harden, 2011; Hogan & Bailey, 2010). While the outcomes of such community engagement activities have been challenged by researchers as further contributing to students’ feelings of power and privilege and, in many cases, of building students’ self-esteem on the backs of the disenfranchised, research also suggests that a socially conscious approach to community partnerships instills in students a greater awareness of societal and structural inequalities and has a tendency to positively shift previously held negative attitudes and stereotypes toward traditionally marginalized groups (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Conley & Hamlin, 2009; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Marichal, 2010). Buch and Harden (2011) invited university students to engage in a community project working with the homeless and found that by the end of the semester, students reported fewer negative stereotypes regarding the homeless and indicated a greater desire to get involved in efforts aimed at helping the homeless. Similarly, Fenzel and Dean (2011), through a semester long community-based child psychology initiative, reported positive shifts in students attitudes toward race and social justice. At the end of the semester, students reported a greater awareness of white privilege and the existence of racism, and a greater likelihood to engage in social justice work. Ladson-Billings (2006) suggests that by confronting social and structural inequities firsthand students gain broader social awareness.

Community-based research (CBR), a socially conscious approach to the generation of new ideas, is one critical approach to community engagement (Polanyi & Cockburn, 2003; Strand, Marullo, Cutfirth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Willis, Peresie, Waldref, & Stockmann, 2003). CBR, defined as “collaborative, change-oriented research, engages faculty members, students, and community members in partnerships that address a community-identified need” (Strand et al., 2003, p. 5). CBR prioritizes the research needs and interests of the community over traditional academic research while still meeting the academic needs of the higher education community. In keeping with the theoretical work of Dewey (1944), CBR advocates for a civic engagement model of education that moves higher education beyond the notion of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” toward work grounded in social action and transformation. What distinguishes CBR from traditional research and from historical ideas of charity-based community work is that it engages colleges/universities and communities in reciprocal, egalitarian partnerships where all participants are both teacher and learner. Successful CBR partnerships reconcile what Friere (1993) recognized as the teacher-student pole of contradiction so that all are simultaneously teacher and student.

In an effort to transform students’ understanding of and relationships with power and...
privilege, CBR uses teaching and learning practices that both confront and destabilize power differentials in society (Conley & Hamlin, 2009). While this justice-based approach to teaching and learning has potential to positively impact all stakeholders, students who engage in CBR particularly benefit. Authentic CBR learning experiences increase students’ awareness of social injustice and enhance their civic engagement and responsibility. Students move from a charity orientation of working in communities toward a socially just orientation of working with communities (Morton, 1995). In a study assessing undergraduates’ beliefs about the benefits of CBR, students indicated that “involvement in CBR allowed us to redefine our education, our communities, and our roles in them” (Willis, et al., 2003, p. 41). Students believed that CBR 1) enriched their traditional academic coursework, 2) empowered them to work with rather than simply serve communities, 3) enhanced their knowledge of social problems and the myriad structural factors that contribute to them, and 4) allowed for successful, authentic integration of academics and community work (Willis, et al., 2003).

With an increasing number of higher education institutions attempting to build authentic community-based learning experiences for students, experiences that are often in communities socioeconomically and ethnically different from the higher education campus community, it is imperative we continue to study the impact of such partnerships on student development. This study examines how race and class shaped students’ experiences with CBR across two community partnerships.

The Course: Community-Based Research Methods

CBR was integrated into two sections of my undergraduate research methods course, a course designed to enhance students’ basic knowledge and understanding of social science research and required of all department majors. A prerequisite to research methods is completion of a year-long introductory human growth and development course. In the year-long course, students complete two 30-hour field placements with a community organization. Therefore, the CBR experience was not the first introduction to community-based learning for my students.

An objective of the community-based research methods course was to help students demonstrate and apply knowledge of diversity (cultural, linguistic, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, racial, sexual orientation) and to help students consider how their social location might influence the design, implementation, and interpretation of social science research. I believe, like many educators, that education should transform academia and be made relevant to the lives of students. Shor (1987) suggests it is naive “to see the classroom as a world apart where inequality, ideology, and economic policy don’t affect learning” (p. 14). Students “bring with them their cultural expectations, their experiences of social discrimination and life pressures, and their strengths in surviving” (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 33). This suggests that as researchers we bring our whole selves to the research experience, our personal experiences, culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and more — all of which can help to shape our research interest as well as how we design and carry out our research.

To better support the objectives of the course, students from two sections of Research Methods entered the diverse communities surrounding my institution. Discussions were held with four community non-profits to assess their research and evaluation needs. Two of the four community non-profits were selected as partners prior to the start of the semester. Each community organization provided students with two to three research and evaluation topics to collectively discuss and choose from. Students were informed of the partnerships and of potential research topics for each section of research methods prior to enrollment. Students worked with each community partner to co-create research questions, to design and implement the study, and to engage in data collection and analysis. Ideally, students would have taken part in choosing a community partner; however, due to timing our community partners were chosen prior to course enrollment.

The CBR partnerships were designed to support the needs of the community non-profits, to enhance students’ knowledge of research and evaluation, and to support students’ personal and professional growth and development. The CBR partnerships aimed to support students’ personal and professional growth and development by better preparing students to work with diverse communities, by providing students with real-world experiences and approaches to social change, and by empowering students to establish reciprocal, egalitarian partnerships with ethnocultural—JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOLARSHIP—Page 32
Partnership One: Museum Partnership

Section one of Research Methods partnered with a local museum. Students and museum staff received the same readings for the course. On second day of the course, we began meeting with representatives from the museum. As a group we traveled to the museum for a tour and to spend time getting to know the space and the museum community (staff and visitors). On the third day, we began the process of co-creating a research plan to evaluate an exhibit designed to encourage children and their families to make healthy lifestyle choices regarding physical activity and nutrition. Five small groups emerged, with each group examining the exhibit through the use of different research techniques (qualitative and/or quantitative). Projects examined the extent to which families 1) have fun, engage with the exhibit and engage with each other, 2) are aware of the messages communicated by the exhibit, 3) make connections between the messages communicated in the exhibit and their own lives, and 4) how families from different backgrounds (ethnic, socioeconomic, educational) experience the exhibit.

Over 50% of our regular class sessions were held at the museum. Additional visits occurred on Fridays from 5–9 p.m., a time when the museum attracts more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse families.

Partnership Two: Community Center Partnership

Students enrolled in section two of Research Methods partnered with a local community center. Center staff was in the early stages of program development and wanted to learn more about programs/services currently operating in their geographic area and about the types of services community members wanted to see integrated into the new center. The center was to be built in a community where two-thirds of its families live below the self-sufficiency living standard with a median family income of just under $21,000 per year. Prior to partnering with us, the community center held over 100 small and large group meetings in the community to gain support and input. On the second day of class, community center representatives and students came together to discuss background information on the center and to discuss ideas to get more community input regarding the design and operation of the proposed community center. (Community center representatives met us on campus since the community center had not been constructed.) We co-created a plan to conduct a needs assessment of the local community that would help our community center partner identify and understand existing community-based programs providing services within a one-mile radius of where the center was to be constructed. Five small group projects emerged from the partnership. Groups examined the extent to which existing community programs were open to partnering with the new center. They also examined membership structures that support family participation, security needs of families that would enhance engagement with the center, mechanisms to support community volunteerism at the center, and the types of services families were interested in participating in at the center.

Over 50% of class sessions were held in the community. Due to the type of research projects designed for this partnership (projects that required students to survey and interview adults in the community) and since the center had not been constructed, students carried out their projects at a number of locations in the community, including the public library, local schools, and at existing community non-profits. This led to more logistical issues to sort through with the community center partnership than with the museum partnership.

Methods

Participants

Forty-four undergraduate students enrolled in two sections of Research Methods at a small private college participated in the research. There were 21 students enrolled in section one and 23 students enrolled in section two of the undergraduate Research Methods course. Participants included mostly juniors and seniors majoring in the social sciences. At the time of the study 18% of the students enrolled at the college identified as students of color and 82% identified as white/Caucasian. Both sections of the course were taught by the author, a tenured African American professor who has taught research methods at the college for over seven years.

Data Sources

Data were collected via anonymous pre and post course evaluations, an anonymous mid-semester check-in, journal notes and observations.
In addition, ongoing meetings were held with community partners where minutes were taken and one community partner maintained a journal.

Data Analysis

To better understand how race and class shape students’ experiences with CBR, a content analysis was conducted on students’ pre, post and mid-semester evaluations and journal entries. Initial patterns in the data evolved from three readings of each data source by the author and readings by two independent readers (Creswell, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patterns yielded evidence of varying experiences/responses to race and class across the two partnerships. Patterns were found regarding students’ attitudes toward the CBR partnerships and toward the value placed on those partnerships.

Students who partnered with the museum engaged with participants who were mostly middle to upper-income and white. Community center partners engaged with participants who were mostly lower-income or working class and of color. Although visitors to the museum were mostly white and economically advantaged, the research developed for the museum had as one of its goals to better understand how families from diverse backgrounds (socioeconomic, educational, and ethnic) experience the museum.

Findings

Embedded throughout the CBR experience was a discussion of racial and cultural identities and of the roles race and class can play in the design, implementation, and interpretation of social science research. In essence, I wanted my students to be mindful that we bring our whole selves to the interactions and activities within which we participate, even in the scientific field of research. Like Vygotsky (1978), I believe learning is inherently linked to our interactions with others and should, as Friere suggests, provoke “conceptual inquiry into self and society and into the very disciplines under study” (as quoted in Shor, 1987, p. 24).

The majority of students enrolled in Research Methods had completed or were currently enrolled in a racial and cultural identities course, a course designed to introduce the critical study of race, culture, and identity. Still, race and class helped to shape students’ attitudes toward each community partnership.

Recognizing and Working through Early Resistance

Students enrolled in each section of research methods expressed resistance to CBR. However, differences were found in how resistance toward CBR manifested among students working with each community partner. For example, student museum partners were required to visit the museum on Friday nights (5–9 p.m.) during a time when more families from ethnically and socio-economically diverse backgrounds tend to visit the museum. As one might imagine, not many college students want to give up a Friday night to conduct research at a museum. A student indicated, “I wish I could visit the museum on Wednesdays. I have a free block that day.” Similarly, another stated, “We should be able to visit the museum anytime it’s open.”

To help students understand the importance of the Friday night visits, during one of our first trips to the museum, 1:00 p.m. on a Thursday, students were asked to simply walk around and observe. Students were again asked to visit the museum, but this time on a Friday night. After the Friday night visit, we engaged in discussion about our overall impressions of the museum. Students saw the diverse representation of families during their Friday night visit and they “got it.” As a student indicated, “I was a little upset with the 5–9 p.m. schedule for the museum. After our Thursday and Friday visits, now I get it.”

The Friday night visit provided a powerful visual representation of how the demographics of the museum shift on Friday nights between 5–9 p.m. when families pay $1 instead of the regular $12 admission fee and when working families have time to attend. Students openly shared their observations and began to critically examine and discuss how economics can contribute to the gaps we see in student achievement – how economic privilege plays a role in creating structural inequalities in students’ learning experiences. The 5–9 p.m. influx of families of color and working class families to the museum suggested to students that these families are interested in and value the museum experience, and that these families attend when the cost of admission is within their financial reach. Student observations led to an even broader discussion about the educational opportunities of lower income
and working class families. Students suggested that just as families have affordable access to the quality informal learning experiences provided by the museum, they should have similar access to a quality education for their children, an education not reliant on a lottery, where one lives, or a family’s socioeconomic status. Following the Friday night visit and reflection exercise, students recognized the value of Friday night visits and no longer expressed this as a concern. Students came to understand that by failing to visit on Friday nights, we would exclude the voices of many ethnically and socioeconomically diverse museum visitors from our research.

Student community center partners also expressed initial concern for their CBR work. However, their concerns were often directed negatively toward the community, with some implying that such a partnership in this predominately lower-income and working class community was a waste of student time and effort. One student indicated, “I don’t think the people will use the center when it is built, so I think they are wasting money on a center in that community.”

It is interesting to note that the community center neighborhood was located within the same city as our college, less than three miles from our classroom and in closer proximity than the museum. Yet, a student indicated, “I really don’t have a connection to the Urbandale (a pseudonym) community because I’ve never heard of the city before.”

I asked my students to map directions to the Urbandale community and students saw the community’s close proximity to the college. We learned that at least two students in the course had completed a field placement in Urbandale and could share their experiences with the class. As a class, we then began the process of assets mapping to engage in discussion of the many positive efforts occurring in Urbandale. Students had the opportunity to learn about a number of community non-profits, two that were nationally recognized for their efforts on behalf of those placed at an economic disadvantage. Students indicated:

The assets map helped me see what Urbandale had to offer. There are good things happening.

I was feeling some discomfort about going into the Urbandale community. … I was surprised by the number of agencies there and their willingness to help.

Students exhibited additional elements of early resistance to CBR as evidenced by their responses to logistical matters regarding the partnership. Both partnerships required students to travel via public transportation. Students traveled in groups to each location.

Transportation worked well for student museum partners. They traveled as a research team to the museum during class time and for Friday night visits. Transportation for the student community center partners was more complicated. Since the community center had not been constructed, students engaged with agencies near the future location of the center. This created logistical challenges for the partnership and sometimes hindered students’ ability to connect with center staff. However, even prior to the start of data collection, student community center partners expressed fear and concern about traveling to the community center neighborhood. The Urbandale community seemed distant, remote. However, distance was not raised as a concern for museum partners even though the museum was farther in distance from campus than the Urbandale community (but perhaps believed by my students to be closer, more similar in ethnicity and socioeconomics). Faculty colleagues also expressed concern for students’ safety traveling via public transportation to the nearby Urbandale community. Due to expressed concerns for student safety, I used the college’s van to carpool students to Urbandale. Implementing the carpool process did not alleviate fears or shift negative perceptions of the partnership. Students commented:

I would rather do research in a place that I’m more comfortable with…. The project as a whole is pointless and stupid in my mind.

Can’t we just do it by email?

This project is a WASTE of MY TIME!

Confronting Race and Class

Appropriate scaffolding, defined as intentional facilitation of students’ learning, helped my students begin to recognize their initial resistance to CBR and helped them move forward.
Their feelings were in some ways normal, a knee-jerk reaction to fear. A student commented, “I was scared first, but talking in class and the assets map helped.” From my perspective, it was okay that my students exhibited initial discomfort toward their work in the community. However, it was not okay for them to stay in a place of fear, of resistance. Growth is in working through the discomfort – getting past the knee-jerk, unconscious reaction to resist.

Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) describe the often unconscious reactions displayed by my students as “a process of struggle, negotiation, and meaning-making” (p. 7), a place where students are attempting to make sense not only of the communities within which they are attempting to engage, but are also attempting to make sense of their personal reactions to working with the community. Events that occurred with each community partnership encouraged my students to consider how race and class influence their interactions with and their openness to engage with individuals from ethnic, and sometimes socioeconomic, backgrounds different from their own. For instance, during one Friday night visit to the museum – just as the demographics began to shift – a small group of six early elementary school aged children of color (children who looked African American/black and or Latino/a by appearance) entered a play space in the museum where children, mostly white, were dancing on a large dance floor. As the children of color entered the dance floor, several white parents who were present in the exhibit began to direct their children away from the dance floor. One parent indicated that the dance floor was “not safe, scary.” One of my students walked over to me and repeated the comment as if she also believed the dance floor had become unsafe. I observed my students in the small group step away from the dance floor as if to coward from the experience. This interaction led to a rich discussion about the role of race and class in our day-to-day interactions. I asked students to describe their observation of what they saw prior to the children of color arriving on the dance floor. They were asked to describe in detail what they saw the white children doing and to describe in detail what they saw the children of color doing and to compare their responses. Students came to see that the behaviors had been the same for both groups – they saw children dancing, no pushing, no yelling - yet people responded differently to the children of color. Somehow the movements, the very presence of the children of color in a space that until 5:00 p.m. had been predominately white conjured up feelings of fear and lack of safety in the minds of some white parents and some of my white students. How we as educators respond to such observations during CBR is critical since these experiences provide opportunities to engage students in critical discourse around the ways in which power and privilege can create fear and contribute to ongoing inequities in society (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Delpitt, 2006; Espino & Lee, 2011; Fenzel & Dean, 2011). These are experiences my students will encounter in their future roles as teachers, social workers, and youth advocates, experiences that I could not have created within the context of my classroom. The experience allowed me and my students to confront and destabilize their knee-jerk reactions to the children of color joining the dance floor, allowing my students to recognize their unintended, unconscious personal responses to race and class. This critical reflection component of CBR is vital to helping students gain deeper meaning from their community-based experience and to enhancing students’ development (Strand, et al., 2003; Toews & Cerny, 2005; Wasserman, 2010).

Student community center partners engaged with a community that has a large Portuguese speaking population. The fact that we were a mostly English only speaking group partnering with a linguistically diverse community was discussed as a limitation early on in our partnership. We were missing the opportunity to learn from a significant part of the community due to our limited proficiency in Portuguese. However, students saw the language differences as a limitation of the community, not of our skills as researchers. This led to a discussion of who owns the limitation, we as researchers or the Portuguese-speaking members of the community? After all, we had entered as non-Portuguese speakers into a community with a large Portuguese speaking population. These community members had not asked for us and therefore, the limitation was ours. Comments made by students led to a discussion of the roles power and privilege play in defining literacy. What does it mean to view the dominant use of Portuguese as a limitation? For a class of mostly teacher educators, how might our view of Portuguese speakers in Urbandale relate to how we view English language learners in the
classroom? Should we all adapt a mainstream discourse of reading, speaking, writing? What does a mainstream discourse look and sound like, and who defines it?

Moving Beyond Resistance

Moving beyond knee-jerk responses to fear and to the less familiar is challenging and ongoing; yet it appears students made some progress in learning how to recognize and confront personal challenges with race and class in their CBR work. Findings suggest shifts in students’ opinions regarding CBR and in their opinions of the communities in which they engaged. These shifts are supported by previous research that has found changes in students’ awareness of issues of race, class, and social justice after just one-semester of community engagement (Buch & Harden, 2011; Fenzel & Dean, 2011; Wasserman, 2010). A student indicated,

I didn’t see why we had to go off campus. I wished I had taken research last semester with someone else. I had heard a lot about Urbandale community – not good. I was scared. ...It felt good to learn about the good work of offices in the community. It made me want to do more.

Similarly, a student reflecting on the dance floor incident at the museum, stated,

I never really thought about my social location until that night at the museum. When we talked about the dance floor – at first I didn’t think anything. Now I see what even little things can mean.

However, not all students moved beyond their initial resistance. Six students continued to exhibit profiles of what Jones, Gilbride-Brown and Gasiorski (2005) referred to as politely frustrated volunteers or active resisters in that they tended to only document their opposition to CBR through written work or they openly and actively opposed their CBR experience throughout the course. A student, characterized as a Politely Frustrated Volunteer, wrote, “Race is not a class. It’s not something people can be taught, not a subject. I took the class because it was required to learn about research not about race.” Similarly, a student who can be characterized as an Active Resister, attempted to convince her group that their interactions with the community could be done via email or web-based data collection and that there was no need to enter the community. The student indicated, “What can happen to us? She [the professor] can’t force us to go.”

Missing from the analysis is a better understanding of factors that would have shifted the perspective of the six students who were less interested in engaging in future community-based research. What could have enhanced their experience and encouraged them to shift their perspectives of CBR and of engaging with the community?

Conclusion/Significance

CBR encouraged my students to consider the roles of race and class in their work and I believe made a significant difference in the lives of my students. Findings suggest that through critical reflection and analysis of their community-based experiences, students made progress toward recognizing and working through their fears and negative perceptions about working with our community partners. Such CBR experiences provide teaching and learning opportunities that cannot be gained by sitting in a classroom. Students learned that “knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action” (Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Rivera, Roberts, Smart, & Upegui, 2001, p. 173). Studies have indicated that working alongside faculty and community partners provide students a sense of empowerment and an increased willingness to impact society (Willis et al., 2003). Students articulated the inherent challenges of CBR – that it is time consuming, at many times messy and uncomfortable, and that CBR took them far outside their comfort zone. Yet, 38 of 44 students indicated that if given the opportunity they would engage in another CBR partnership. A student commented,

I feel the experience opened the doors to engaging with families from Urbandale and even elsewhere. It helped me build my confidence in myself to work with the community and maybe even lead a community partnership one day.

As a full participant in the CBR process, I was challenged to help my students come to un-
derstand that the work we engage in with communities is critical to their (and my) personal and professional growth as teachers, social workers, and youth advocates. However, while I observed significant growth in my students, this study is limited in that it does not assess the sustained impact of CBR on students’ development. Future studies should assess the long-term impact of community-based research on students’ development. While there are many challenges to such a partnership, such as varying levels of student readiness to work with diverse communities and the enormous time commitment on the part of faculty and students, the importance of partnerships of this nature is the empowerment that results from the learning associated with the experience. Partnerships of this nature have the ability to change how students see themselves relative to the world and to encourage students to become agents of change.

References


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**About the Author**

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Abstract

In this paper, we discuss a community-university partnership struck with the intention of carrying out data analysis for the purposes of service planning and policy implementation that led us to find ourselves in the middle of significant stakeholder conflict. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon and illuminate the challenges affecting this partnership revealing the impactful contextual factors through a process of reflection and consultation with the research literature. The significant benefits to ensuring a participatory process for both the university faculty and community agency have been cited in the research literature; yet the very real challenges inherent in such a process are less well documented. This example of civic engagement is presented through a partnership between a university faculty member and a children’s mental health center. An analysis of the partnership within the project is presented to illuminate power and contextual factors that can influence partnership projects. As part of the contextual factors, we review the process of partnerships both through the literature and analysis of our project. Suarez-Balczar, Harper, and Lewis’ (2005) model for developing university community partnerships provides guidance while questions for considering the scope are recommended and suggestions for future partnerships including increasing stakeholder breadth are identified.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement can be a tension for universities as they attempt to navigate their many roles (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simons, 2004) and address contextual factors, including partnership process and stakeholder groups, which influence the outcome of the partnership and require particular attention at the outset of the partnership.

Civic engagement is a process of learning, involving engagement between the University and the community agency. Contrary to Fish’s (2005) position that institutions of higher learning should not participate in service learning or civic engagement, many authors believe that university researchers can successfully collaborate with agencies in a relationship of mutual respect for strengths to support the application of evidence-based practice (Bellamy, Bledsoe, Mullen, Fang, & Manuel, 2008). We reflect on lessons learned from this civic engagement experience and look forward to future projects.

The Project

This university-community partnership developed from a mutual need with goals that were clear to the partners (Varcoe, 2006). The agency was in need of the expertise provided by the university and the university was in need of expanding its community partnerships. The agency collected consumer data through two provincially mandated evidence-based assessment tools (in addition to consumer demographic data) as a part of the agency’s regular practice. Analysis of the data was required to inform service delivery after being informed by the funder that funding increases were not forthcoming. Thus, the partnership in this paper began in response to government (funder) messaging to navigate scarce resources with creativity and independence.

A day treatment program (institutional setting) and a school-based program (community school setting) were offered by the center to elementary age children with comparable consumer demographic and clinical profiles.

The second author completed data analysis and reported findings that both programs were effective back to the agency. The agency used the results of the data analysis to inform program changes to reduce the number of children in the day treatment program and increase the number of children receiving service in the school-based program. The decision would effectively achieve the goal of the funder: no reduction in service, while maintaining the financial status quo. It also supported the agency’s mission and vision to provide the least intrusive services possible to children and families, allowing children to
maintain their ties to community schools. The agency met with the funder to discuss the data analysis outcome and proposed changes in service planning. The report was well received by the funder, who encouraged the agency to present the findings to the local children’s mental health community.

Jill Grant presented the findings to the agency’s closest partners. At this stage, there was reaction to the presentation of data analysis and proposed changes for service planning, both in favor and opposed. The oppositional views were spoken most loudly. The negative reaction from some partners was viewed by the university-community partnership as a normal reaction to proposed change. Given that the funder supported the proposed changes, little attention from the partnership was given to the negative reaction by some partners and this turned out to be a significant contextual factor. Suarez-Herrera (2009) suggests that resistance to intentional change can be mitigated through educating people about the research process. This would have needed to occur prior to our project beginning, which is challenging when the data collection is a normal part of an organization’s practice.

The next step was a presentation to the broader children’s mental health community. Unknown to the partnership, discussions had occurred between the members of the first and second group prior to this second presentation. The strength of the negative reaction to the presentation was completely unexpected by the partnership. With the passing of time and presentation of the experience at a national conference, we have begun to counter the reactions. As a first step, we consulted the literature.

Review of the Literature

The literature review begins with a discussion of some recent provincial policy papers in the field of children’s mental health through the lens of Canadian social welfare analysts’ prediction that government would use self-deception to address inadequate funding for agencies (Baines, 2004). The literature review concludes with a review of community and conflict assessment related to the partnership process.

Regionalization

The province of Ontario has recently experienced regionalization of health and mental health care services, the last province in Canada to move to regionalization. All other provinces in Canada made this shift in the 1980s and 1990s (Church & Barker, 1998; Simpson, 2011). Justification for regionalization includes better coordination, reduction in expenditures, and citizen participation in decision-making. Church and Barker (1998) identified a number of significant challenges to regionalization, including the integration and coordination of services, the difficulties gaining access to reliable epidemiological data, citizen participation in decision-making, and increased costs. A study by Weaver (2006) suggests that regionalization in British Columbia could not be described as an effective reform, with information gathering the only success. Baines (2004) predicted that smaller non-profit organizations would have to increase fundraising and conform to accreditation standards, eventually being taken over by larger organizations. She further predicted that the result of downsizing would be an increase in service provision by the private sector, an uncommon situation in the Canadian social welfare context.

Ontario Children’s Mental Health

In 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services presented its policy framework. Included as one of the five principles for the framework is that the mental health system for children should be evidence-based and accountable. The first goal identified in the policy report called for collaboration, integration, and shared responsibility (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2006). Children’s Mental Health Ontario (2011) also supports evidence-informed practices, promotion of effectiveness, and efficiency and promotion of accountability to all stakeholders. The recommendations are intended to improve service effectiveness for consumers.

Agencies trying to navigate the higher demands for service accountability with fewer resources have turned to evidence-based programs as they are perceived to be accepted by government funders and provide the tools to encourage confidence in accountability, for example, well-packaged materials, staff training, and technical assistance (Small, Cooney, & O’Connor, 2009).
Partnership Types

Fisher et al. (2004) describe four types of civic engagement: service learning, local economic development, community-based research, and social work initiatives. This project most closely resembles community-based research, although it is more accurately described as data analysis. The agency did not have the internal capacity to do a thorough program evaluation and wanted the results of data analysis of two programs: day treatment and school based children’s intervention program. The partnership with the second author allowed for data analysis of the agency’s regularly collected data.

Partnership types can be dependent on the relationship between the researcher and community partner; here, a trusting and respectful relationship developed through transparency, communication, and respect for diversity and for the culture of the organization (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005). The partners were transparent about the purposes for the partnership: service and community connection (for Dr. Grant), and a means to inform service delivery decisions at a time of financial pressures (agency director).

Social capital, bonding and bridging are identified by Putnam (2000) as relevant factors in university-community partnerships. Social capital has both a private and a public face, meaning the relationships that are gained from partnerships can have benefits for both the person and the larger community. Bonding refers to how the partners will get by or how they need to work together to get things done, while bridging reflects a more future-oriented benefit of getting ahead.

The agency was seeking connections for their own benefit (bonding) to have their programs evaluated; yet they suspected and anticipated that the outcome would have benefits for the wider community of children’s services and children’s mental health. The university was aware of the partnership’s future potential in addition to the immediate connection. Capacity building occurs when systems such as a university and community agency come together in ways that can lead to community development through the coalescence of capacities (Homan, 2011). For example, social networks of each partner have value and that value is enhanced through the reciprocity and trustworthiness inherent in those networks.

Nelson, Prilleltensky, and MacGillivary (2001) envision university-community partnerships as value-based, striving to advance caring, compassion, community, health, self-determination, participation, power sharing, human diversity, and social justice for oppressed groups. Shared values between the university and the agency drove our process: We developed a collective vision of this partnership from the beginning. The community of children’s mental health and the community of children’s services are systems that also have values. For this university-community partnership truly to start with shared values, we now understand, a wider scope may have been required when considering the value-holders.

The value of relationship in partnerships cannot be overstated, and successful partnerships can take time to develop (Baum, 2000). Homan (2011) discusses the power of relationships that requires communication, trust, and mutual interest. The process of this project provided opportunity for dialogue between the agency and university regarding these issues and allowed relationships to take root as collaborative partners. In addition to what Homan (2011) notes as requirements of relationships, these partners brought with them a number of additional attributes that helped to facilitate mutual learning, including power addressed from a perspective of strengths (Grant & Cadell, 2009), an acceptance of difference, a belief in partnership and collaborations, and a willingness to risk.

Partnership Principles

Hudson and Hardy (2002) identify six principles in university-community partnerships: 1) acknowledgement of the need for partnership; 2) clarity and realism of purpose; 3) commitment and ownership; 4) development and maintenance of trust; 5) establishment of clear and robust partnership arrangements; and 6) monitoring, review, and organizational learning. In the initial meeting of our partnership, we established the first three principles. We acknowledged the mutual benefit in that the agency would realize data analysis for service planning while the university would provide a service-learning experience to a graduate student and would also have the use of the data. In addition to the service-learning experience of the graduate student, front-line social workers and managers were involved in the partnership through discussions at the planning stage and data entry. This illustrates both the
partnership values of power sharing (Nelson et al., 2001) and the realities of scarce resources within not-for-profit organizations.

Partnership Principle 4, development and maintenance of trust, developed both from the process and from the values of the individuals involved in the process. The process was clearly delineated from the initial meeting, identifying responsibilities and accountabilities for each of the partners (Principle 5) and, as the project proceeded with each partner reliably completing their agreed upon tasks, trust in the partnership was maintained. We acknowledged the strengths of each partner, providing a perception of equal status within the partnership (Hudson & Hardy, 2002). There were a number of agency learnings starting with the outcome of the data analysis. Beyond that, the university-community partnership was further nurtured through the dissemination of the data at an international Children’s Mental Health conference (Grant, Kuhn, & Roper, 2010). Power was further shared in this example, when Dr. Grant encouraged the agency and research assistant to be the disseminators of knowledge at the conference, taking her out of the role of expert.

The role of the expert was shared in additional ways. The partners each possess personal and professional maturity and experience, and a belief in many ways of knowing and many kinds of knowledge. The role of expert can and did shift between the partners at various points in the partnership.

Defining the partners in this university-community partnership as the university and agency meant that our lens was narrow. Within that narrow view, our evaluation of the project is perceived as picture perfect, according to Hudson and Hardy’s (2002) partnership principles. Later, however, we reflected on the challenges inherent in the contextual factors that affected our project.

**Partnership Process and Conflict**

The literature on community assessment suggests that partnerships begin with a community needs assessment as a form of research (Beverly, 2005; Craig, 2011; Suarez-Herrara, 2009; Norris & Schwartz, 2009). Community needs assessments are perceived as a collaborative, dialectical process, engaging multiple stakeholders including funders, service providers, and service users. It is understood that these varied stakeholders may bring conflicting perspectives; yet there is a belief that the collaborative nature of this approach can increase cooperation through mutual interaction (Suarez-Herrera, 2009). Community needs assessments identify service needs and barriers and illuminate a community’s capacity to meet the needs of its citizens (Beverly, 2005; Norris & Schwartz, 2009). This networking opportunity provides numerous benefits for the community as a whole despite the additional costs and is one of the reasons Beverly (2005) promotes an inclusive stakeholder group.

Participatory evaluations or needs assessments present challenges. For example, when decision-making processes of an organization restrict participation of stakeholders, there may be increased resistance to intentional change by stakeholders (Suarez-Herrera, 2009). For this reason, Suarez-Herrera suggests a process called capacity building for evaluative research (CBER), a means of providing education about research-based evaluation. Weber (2007) identifies vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (interdependent and collaborative) dimensions of relationships. He concludes that communities require a combination of vertical and horizontal capacity dimensions to develop and maintain relationships of trust toward the achievement of partnership goals.

Conflict may be inevitable in projects that bring together multiple stakeholders. Including stakeholders in collaborative, transparent planning processes is considered an important dimension in managing tensions (Lobosco & Kaufman, 1989; Reilly, 1994; Seghezzo, Volante, Paruelo, Somma, Bulubasich, Rodriguez, Gagnon, & Hufty, 2011). It is vital to recognize that government and other institutions may have a great impact when striking partnerships with the social service sector, either through funding or policy decisions (Bornstein, 2010), particularly in Canada, where three levels of government may be involved.

Bornstein (2010) recommends the use of a peace and conflict impact assessment to assist in identifying interventions that contribute to either peace-building or to conflict. Organizations will then have a better understanding of the impact of their proposed activities. At the same time, community building processes begin through the inclusive nature of this evaluation, particularly when used as part of a strategic planning process.

**Partnership Analysis**

Having reviewed the literature related
to partnerships, we analyze our partnership. Figure 1 demonstrates the three stages of the analysis. Stage 1 is the analysis of existing data and data management suggestions, when Dr. Grant understood the project as the university joining with the agency and therefore having responsibility to the agency. Without realizing it, Dr. Grant was caught in the middle of a process much larger than the original university-community partnership agreement.

Reflections on that process provided important learning for Dr. Grant that now inform future projects and that help to continue to develop our understanding of university-community partnerships. In particular, asking “who else needs to be at the table?” even when just analyzing internal data for an agency, has been clarified as an essential step. Similarly, what starts as an internal project can very easily become influential or conflictual in a broader community context. This is obvious when one is conducting research, but when asked to analyze already collected data, it is similarly important. A community needs assessment may have flagged this conflict and provided a process for dialogue about the project.

Stage 2 involved the presentation of findings: to the agency staff, then the agency’s closest partners, and then the broader children’s mental health community. This stage reflects the nature of the vertical capacity dimension operating in our community whereby the agency responded to the hierarchical processes of the funder/agency relationship rather than relying on a more horizontal capacity dimension. Additionally, the inclusiveness of the stakeholder groups is limited.

Stage 3 includes the presentation to the agency of the report itself. This stage reflects what could have been the beginning of an ongoing collaborative partnership to assist the agency in program evaluation and research and planning. Instead, conflict within the community based on competition for resources made this very difficult. The use of a peace and conflict impact assessment could have illuminated the potential impact of conflict that resulted from our process (Figure 1).

Part of the process of understanding the reactions from the broader community relates to understanding the importance of timing when plans for change are announced. It is always complex to imagine the reactions of stakeholders to new information that one group has been working with for a long time. The reactions we experienced were a good reminder of the importance of carefully thinking through how and when to announce findings and changes. The agency was now requesting something more of the university-community partnership than was originally negotiated. The agency no longer just required the outcome of the project but also needed the support of the university in putting forward a new discourse. At this point, the university partner realized that the situation was much more complex than originally understood.

The definition of university-community partnerships and the identity of the community may help to inform the initial consultation process of partnerships. The development of trust and acquaintance with the setting and culture may well need to include outside stakeholders. The process of disseminating the outcome of the project to the stakeholders through local presentations and conferences did not allow for the stakeholders to be part of the decision-making process at the beginning stages of the project for a broader collaboration (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005). This may have been predicted had we considered the literature on conflict assessment and instead included peace-building strategies (Bornstein, 2010), ensuring the inclusiveness of a broad range of stakeholders (Lobosco & Kaufman, 1989; Reilly, 1994; Seghezzo et al., 2011). We also needed to consider a more sophisticated analysis of power.

**Power**

Some researchers support a position that power imbalances are inherent in university-
community partnerships (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004). Others suggest that many partnerships maintain their power imbalances, never becoming transformative. This project provided a number of examples of shared power experiences (Nelson et al., 2001). Generally, the power dynamic between the university and community partners appears to vary depending on each partner’s sense of their own power and how the researcher is viewed (Carrick, Mitchell, & Lloyd, 2001). In our project, power was managed in the partnership through sharing and shifting. Power shifted depending on the particular stage of the project.

Michel Foucault analyzed power as a process contained within a relationship, as something that is exercised and not possessed in the traditional discourse of power (Foote, 1986). Foucault also viewed power as a positive and productive process in addition to the traditional view of power as negative and repressive. Foucault’s position about power from this point of view provided opportunity for change, control, and empowerment.

Power can be used to dominate, collaborate, or educate. It has the capacity to move people in a direction to accomplish a desired end (Homan, 2004) and by its nature can be gained or lost (Carrick, Mitchell, & Lloyd, 2001). In our project, the partners had the implicit intent to use power to collaborate and educate by joining together for the purposes of data analysis. The desired end in this situation included the completion of the data analysis, the possibility of future collaborations, introducing research practices, or the shifting of service provision to a less intrusive service for children and families.

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (cited in Lukes, 2005) discuss power from a dominant/subservient perspective, noting that there is an assumption that conflict must always be present with power. The argument they put forward is “the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place” (Lukes, 2005, pp. 26–27). This statement supports the hypothesis that power is value-based or value-dependent and, as a result, the use of power is predetermined by societal value.

Power, then, can be positive, productive, and mobilizing, or negative and repressive. In our project, the process had aspects of power that were both. The fact that the partnership ignored the broader community in our project may represent a dominant/subservient position of power. Another view of this might be that the larger children’s mental health community partners dominated the smaller children’s mental health agency when the changes were not in line with their values and plans for the future. These differences might be supported by the predetermined societal values, placing some community partners at a power advantage over the other (Lukes, 2005).

The intended use of power by the partnership in this project fits better with Foucault’s description in that each partner used power as a way to make change and empower, to produce something more than either partner could produce alone. Power was silent, not as a means of creating barriers, but rather to mobilize or to help the agency move forward.

There were many contextual factors that influenced power in this project, extending outside the partnership and local community to include political, structural, and cultural factors. Some of these include the messaging from policy papers, the inadequate funding capacities, competition resulting from regionalization, and the unknown values on a community level regarding power sharing.

Homan (2011) reminds us that the base of power of the actor must be larger than the issue the actor is working on. In this example, the desired end was not discussed with the community as a whole and some partners had differing ideas about what the end should be. The relationship between the university and agency was solid but less solid were the relationships within the practice community. Interestingly enough, the relationship between some community partners strengthened significantly while rallying against this university-community partnership in an attempt to block the proposed changes. This latent use of power as described by Shermer and Schmid (2007) may result in influencing others even if it may mean a conflict with their own interest.

Within our partnership, the agency was seeking to move forward in challenging fiscal times and we made the assumption that others shared our vision. A community of agencies that share a horizontal capacity dimension may share a common vision and provide opportunity to mobilize communities (Norris & Schwartz, 2009). We considered only a micro analysis of the agency, ignoring the macro analysis and attention to “local capacity and will” (Lobosco & Kaufman, 1989, p.
142), again relying on our assumptions noted above.

Model for Developing University-Community Partnerships

The model developed by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) can be used to understand our university-community partnership experience when considering the two central partners (Figure 2). Using the language of the university-community partnership model, our partnership developed trust and mutual respect as discussed in the partnership principles (Hudson & Hardy, 2002). The model also demonstrated respect for human diversity and, through our planning and implementation, established adequate communication. We were in the process of developing a culture of learning through our project work, as discussed in the section on partnership principles put forward by Hudson and Hardy (2002) and developing an action agenda based on the outcome of the data analysis when we became aware of the challenges inherent in excluding the community partners in our initial planning. Respecting the culture of the setting and the community was an oversight. Our assumption about a pre-existing shared vision in line with the funder’s strategic plan was just that: an assumption.

Our experience calls into question the meaning of university-community partnerships. Diamond (2004) states that power differences will remain within and between organizations. If this is true, we require further consideration of managing power within the broader community, and particularly within multi-agency partnerships. How then, is power shared and collaboration achieved through university-community partnerships, when there are competing conceptions of need within communities, differing professional discourses, varying decision-making abilities and capacities to control information flow (Diamond, 2004)? The literature on community assessment suggests community engagement and community planning is required beyond individual agencies, starting with a needs assessments (Craig, 2011; Norris & Schwartz, 2009; Suarez-Herrera, 2009) to help mobilize communities and gain social capital (Weber, 2007). It could be a parallel process to that which we experienced in our project but on a much broader scale increasing complexity and requiring attention to a common vision. After this experience, the assumption that an entire community of multiple stakeholders and multiple agencies could have a common vision challenges us.

Lessons Learned

As we reflect upon this civic engagement experience, we have come to appreciate the many learnings from our partnership. One of the learnings for both the agency and Dr. Grant was that the relationships beyond the dyad were not explored, (as Putnam, 2000, calls bridging) to more fully understand the complexities of the contextual factors. In retrospect, it is clearer that the partnership would have benefited from broader consultation with the partner agencies. Neglect of the community’s contextual factors played a significant role in the outcome of this project. The peripheral partners’ values turned out to be a significant oversight, and our experience taught us the value of questioning who the partners are in a university-community partnership. Implementation of a process similar to that suggested by Bornstein (2010) may have enabled us to more clearly

Figure 2. University-Community Partnership

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see the potential for conflict.

From this experience emerged an understanding of the importance of exploring fully the range of stakeholders and their potential reactions. Again, this is common practice in community-based research; yet this experience highlights the importance of this step even when one is simply analyzing data for a community partner. The most important learning was an increased awareness of the need to take time to discuss the other stakeholders who will be affected by potential outcomes of university-community partnerships.

A final learning from this experience is that, because the partnership did not consider the potential impact on the broader community at the initial stage of the project, the synergy of potential between the university and community agency in this project could not be realized. This experience has taught us that there needs to be at least knowledge, through consultation, with other community partners.

Our work has highlighted that a whole new set and level of negotiations may need to occur between the university and community, depending on how wide the lens extends with the following questions in mind:

• What does the culture of community mean when you include a broad community?
• Who does the community include? How do you know and who decides?
• To what extent can you know if you have included all of the potential partners?
• Considering that each community partner will have their own independent set of partners, is it possible to manage such a large, seemingly endless system?

Our questions lead us to consider the university-community partnership process going forward. An exploration with agencies having the intention of identifying key stakeholders will provide a basis for understanding the scope of the project from the agency’s perspective. At a minimum, the dialogue will allow the agency to reflect on potential outcomes of not including a large stakeholder group. Inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders, such as funders, service providers, and citizens may help to capture a more reasonable community reality and improve stakeholder relationships through understanding and dialogue. The same university-community partnership model (Figure 2) used to describe this project can be applied to projects with larger stakeholder scope: developing trust and mutual respect, respecting human diversity, establishing adequate communication, establishing a culture of learning, respecting the culture of the setting and the community, and developing an action agenda. A number of ideas from the community assessment and conflict assessment literature can assist in this process.

Bornstein (2010) highlights the significance of ensuring consistency between policy and practice. Stakeholder groups, then, need to begin with the decision-makers at each level, or example, policy makers and funders, agency managers, front-line staff and service users. Trust and mutual respect can be achieved when collaborative processes are transparent. The capacity building for evaluative research process put forward by Suarez-Herrera (2009) is intended to establish a culture of learning and can be used to educate the stakeholders at the beginning of the project. This capacity-building process provides stakeholders opportunity “to question agency goals, strategies and assumptions” (p. 334) and gain a better understanding of and commitment to the inter-relatedness of the service system because inherent in this research is an understanding that all participants are evaluators through a critical and reflective process.

The peace and conflict impact assessment (Bornstein, 2010) can be utilized at the beginning stage to highlight potential conflicts to the process and illuminate peace-building strategies. A collaborative process of identifying community needs through a community needs assessment can begin to illuminate the varying stakeholder values and agendas, respecting diversity of stakeholder groups. Bringing together stakeholders at various levels to address the disparities in policy and practice can be part of the community needs assessment. Addressing the challenge of impoverished resources can become a shared responsibility. Through this collaborative process, the stages of Suarez-Balcazar’s (2009) model can be identified by the university partner and tracked throughout the partnership to consider, for example, how trust and mutual respect are being honored. The outcome of this empowering community process can lead to a more effective action plan, one in which stakeholders have a vested interest in the success for each individual agency as part of a larger community plan.

Conclusion
University civic engagement provides opportunity for sharing of resources between a community agency and university while also creating potential challenges inherent in this sort of collaboration.

Our project highlighted the complexity of the process involved in university-community partnerships. Considering partnership types, partnerships, partnership principles, and the partnership project, this paper illuminates the need to consider partnerships from a broadened perspective, including the process of the partnership. It became clear to the community and agency partners through this project that there remains a need to engage community partners in dialogue about service visions and funding challenges.

This suggested approach to university-community partnerships requires clarity of partners and process on a much wider scale than is typically used in a small agency-specific data analysis project. The challenge is for communities to agree on a common vision or perhaps to work across differences when considering a set of values for working with the university and the management of power relations and resources. The university will need to consider the amount of time and energy that will be required to generate the partnerships they seek. The exercise of mining for common values may involve a larger group and require extended time to ensure all community voices are heard. The model by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) for developing university community partnerships requires clarity of partners and process on a much wider scale than is typically used in a small agency-specific data analysis project. The challenge is for communities to agree on a common vision or perhaps to work across differences when considering a set of values for working with the university and the management of power relations and resources. The university will need to consider the amount of time and energy that will be required to generate the partnerships they seek. The exercise of mining for common values may involve a larger group and require extended time to ensure all community voices are heard. The model by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) for developing university community partnerships can be used to guide broader partnerships.

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Predicting Community Engagement? 
The Carnegie Foundation’s Elective Classification

Andrew J. Pearl

Abstract
The Carnegie Foundation’s elective Community Engagement classification is valuable for colleges and universities seeking to demonstrate a mutually beneficial relationship with the community. This study uses logistic regression analysis to identify predictive institutional characteristics for applying for and receiving the Community Engagement classification. The findings suggest that publicly available institutional financial variables are not predictive of an institution applying for and receiving the classification.

Introduction
In 2006, the first set of institutions was granted the elective Community Engagement classification from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The Community Engagement classification represents the first of a proposed line of elective classifications that are intended to serve a descriptive purpose for colleges and universities. The traditional Carnegie classification system was originally developed to aid researchers in higher education, but has since been used for a variety of other purposes not directly related to objective research, including rankings of institutions (McCormick & Zhao, 2005). The Carnegie Foundation has continuously evolved the classification system to keep with the original purpose of objectively providing information for research, but the drive for maintaining and moving up the rankings has made this difficult. To move the classification system forward, the Carnegie Foundation sought to “fill some of the gaps in the national data” by developing elective classifications to capture more of the work done by colleges and universities (McCormick & Zhao, 2005, p. 56).

The community engagement classification was the first of these elective classifications and was intended to “respect the diversity of institutions and their approaches to community engagement; engage institutions in a process of inquiry, reflection, and self-assessment; and honor institutions’ achievements while promoting the ongoing development of their programs” (Driscoll, 2008, p. 39). In other words, this elective classification process was designed to bring a greater degree of nuance to how colleges and universities report their activities. The institutions that choose to participate in this elective classification process would have a Carnegie-sponsored endorsement of their engagement with the community. The institutional applications are evaluated by a National Advisory Panel made up of leading experts in the field of community engagement.

The first group of institutions to receive the elective classification was named in 2006, with a second round coming in 2008. In these first two cohorts, institutions could be classified as community engaged through curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, or both (Carnegie Foundation, 2012). Curricular engagement refers to the integration of community engagement with the institution’s teaching and learning. Outreach and partnerships required documentation of established and productive partnerships with the community. Applicants could choose to apply for either or both subcategories. The next time the classification was awarded, 2010, there were no longer subcategories; institutions had to demonstrate community engagement at all levels of the institution. In 2015, the institutions that were awarded the community engagement classification in either 2006 or 2008 will be required to reapply to maintain their classification, and the institutions that received the classification in 2010 will reapply in 2020. In addition to receiving the formal designation, the process of applying has shown to be instructive on many campuses, serving as a self-assessment tool. This has helped institutions to identify opportunities for improvement of their community engagement practices (Zuiches, 2008).

In order for colleges and universities to either continue with their community-engaged
classification or to become classified for the first time, it is important for them to understand what is necessary for a successful application. The application form requires institutions to document and report their community-engaged activities. These applications are thoroughly evaluated by a review committee with regard to how well community engagement has been institutionalized. The purpose of this study is to examine elements related to community engagement on campus that are not reported on the Carnegie Foundation’s documentation form. Specifically, this study examines publicly available financial data that are theoretically related to community engagement to determine whether those indicators can be predictive of an institution being awarded the classification.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided using multiple theoretical and conceptual lenses. First, the scholarship of engagement explains how community-engaged work is viewed in higher education. The scholarship of engagement sets the stage for the community-engaged relationship that the Carnegie Foundation is seeking to reward. Second, this study examines how resources are allocated in higher education, relying primarily on the process described by Massey (1996). According to Massey, resources are in part allocated where they will do the most good and where the institution places its priorities. However, universities undertake complex processes in order to judiciously allocate resources. This theory will partially help to explain how institutions decide how much money to allocate to engagement initiatives. Finally, academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) plays a role in the allocation of resources. Academic capitalism describes how colleges and universities have taken on characteristics of the market in order to remain competitive. These market forces have largely led to an increased emphasis on research and other activities that increase institutional prestige in higher education.

The Scholarship of Engagement

In Scholarship Reconsidered, Boyer (1990) outlined four areas of scholarship in higher education. The scholarship of discovery is associated with advancing new knowledge through research. The scholarship of teaching is associated with the transmission of knowledge from an expert (the professor or instructor) to a novice (the student). The scholarship of integration refers to scholars reaching across disciplinary lines in order to bring new perspectives to solving academic problems. Finally, the scholarship of application means answering the question, “How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems? How can it be useful to the individual as well as institutions” (p. 21). In other words, how can colleges and universities use their collective resources beyond the ivory tower and move beyond basic research that advances knowledge for the pure sake of advancing knowledge?

Boyer continued to develop his ideas regarding the scholarship of application, and the concept is now more commonly referred to as the scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1996). Engagement extended what Boyer discussed with application. Whereas application refers to institutional resources being applied to consequential community problems, engagement takes this idea further and involves a greater role for the community in identifying and solving the problem. The scholarship of engagement means, “Connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems…creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other” (pp. 19–20). The key transition was the movement from the idea of the university doing work for the community, and instead doing work with the community. An engaged relationship between the institution and the community is now also seen as mutually beneficial (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2002). It is this type of engaged relationship that the Carnegie Foundation is interested in recognizing through the elective Community Engagement classification. For an official definition, the Carnegie Foundation states that “community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Carnegie Foundation, 2012).

Resource Allocation in Higher Education

Massey (1996) discussed the fact that the allocation of funds in higher education goes
beyond simply investing in the programs the institutions believe are the most important. While this is a simple solution, the practice of allocating resources is a process that involves actors with expertise and knowledge making informed decisions about the priorities of the institution. The actual process that is followed has a significant impact on where resources are allocated, and can provide insight into where the institution places its priorities. The process can help a college or university align its institutional mission and purpose with the demands of the market. Both of these elements are of crucial importance to the university: Proper response to the markets allows for an institution to remain competitive for the best students and the best faculty and staff, leading to greater rewards in terms of more diversified streams and increased prestige. Keeping consistent with its mission allows the university to remain true to its core values and many of the factors that make the institution unique.

According to Massey (1996), budgeting and allocating resources is often used strategically by universities and colleges. This framework applies to this particular study because of the decision-making process that is necessary when deciding the extent of the institution’s financial commitment to community engagement. While receiving the Community Engagement classification may align with the institution’s commitment to its mission, the amount of money may not necessarily reflect that commitment. Institutions can employ multiple strategies of resource allocation, and because of this, there are several paths available for institutions to be able to engage with their respective communities.

**Academic Capitalism**

The process of resource allocation has been influenced by the growing trend of academic capitalism, which is the theory that guides higher education’s growing involvement in markets and market-like behaviors, with diversified streams of revenue (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). This idea of academic capitalism stems from resource dependency, which dictates that an organization is beholden to its environment and the resources that environment makes available (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In the current higher education landscape, research has often become the mechanism for increased institutional prestige, and investment in this arena has often come at the expense of other areas seen as less prestigious, or that generate less revenue.

Public service activities have not traditionally been seen as activities that increase the prestige of the institution, and are therefore slighted when institutions prepare their annual budgets as they decide how to allocate financial resources as the tendency toward academic capitalism increases (Jaeger & Thornton, 2005). As public service work (of which community-engaged work is a part) continues to take on an increasingly diminished role in higher education, the funding continues to decrease. This is a troubling trend, as stable funding is seen as crucial to maintaining a community-engaged institution (Kellogg Commission, 1999). If institutions are dedicated to community engagement to the degree that they are applying for the Community Engagement classification, then it should follow that the financial support of public service and community-engaged work is sufficiently supportive. In this study, financial variables associated with public service and community-engaged work are examined in order to see if they can serve as predictors of an institution receiving the Community Engagement classification. This study asks are market-like trends in fact diverting funding away from public service and community engagement, and are institutions still able to perform work the Carnegie Foundation deems worthy of the Community Engagement classification?

Within these conceptual frameworks, this study addresses the following research question: Can financial variables (both in terms of revenue and expenses) serve as significant predictors of whether an institution applies for and receives the Carnegie Foundation’s elective Community Engagement classification?

**Review of the Relevant Literature**

In 2009, a special issue of *New Directions for Higher Education* was dedicated to lessons learned from the first group of institutions receiving the Carnegie Community Engagement classification (Sandmann, Thornton, & Jaeger, 2009). The articles in this compilation addressed issues related to leadership and engagement (Sandmann & Plater, 2009), rewards associated with community-engaged scholarship (Saltmarsh, Giles, Ward, & Buglione, 2009), improving service-learning and other curricular-based engagement
(Bringle & Hatcher, 2009), benchmarking and assessment (Furco & Miller, 2009), enhancing partnerships (Beere, 2009), engagement and institutional advancement (Weerts & Hudson, 2009), institutional understanding of engagement (Thornton & Zuiches, 2009), and the future of community engagement in higher education (Holland, 2009). However, these are not research studies per se, and rely primarily on the authors’ experience and expertise with the institutions classified as community engaged to provide a set of best practices and theoretical implications for readers. Those who worked on successful Community Engagement applications have shared lessons that they learned during the application process (Zuiches, 2008), but those reports are largely anecdotal in nature and do not include empirical tests.

There have been multiple qualitative research studies involving the Community Engagement classification. For example, researchers have examined issues such as the adoption of engagement in higher education, how institutional characteristics and control influence approaches to engagement, and external understanding and evaluation of engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Researchers have also qualitatively examined promotion and tenure policies as reported in the 2006 Carnegie Community Engagement classification applications (Saltmarsh, Giles, O'Meara, Sandmann, Ward, & Buglione, 2009). The Community Engagement classification has also been used to provide insight and commentary on how health collaborations have been encouraged in higher education (Sandmann & Driscoll, 2011).

While these qualitative studies and essays have been useful resources for those seeking to understand more about the elective Community Engagement classification, there is a paucity of quantitative research studies on the subject. This is understandable from the perspective that the application and documentation form largely requires narrative descriptions of programs that demonstrate connections and partnerships with the community as well as institutional commitment. However, in order to gain a different perspective of the Community Engagement classification, quantitative analysis should also be employed in order to begin to identify national and generalizable trends. This study seeks to begin to fill that gap in the literature by analyzing publicly available institutional data to determine whether these indicators are predictive of institutions receiving the Community Engagement classification.

**Methods**

This study employs logistic regression to determine whether a set of publicly available institutional financial characteristics can be predictive of the maximum likelihood of an institution applying for and receiving the Carnegie Community Engagement classification. The information provided in this study will lend insight as to whether there are factors other than the reporting application at play in the granting of the Community Engagement classification.

**Sample**

The institutions selected for this study are all four-year public colleges and universities. This study examines a cross-sectional sample of data from the academic year 2009 and uses that data to examine institutions that received the Community Engagement classification as a part of the 2010 cohort. The final sample includes 366 institutions, 47 of which received the Community Engagement classification and 319 which did not. Institutions that had previously received the designation in either 2006 or 2008 were omitted.

**Variable Selection**

The data for this study are publicly available from the Delta Cost Project (http://www.deltacostproject.org/), which was initiated to help researchers learn more about the spending and revenue practices of colleges and universities. Specifically for this study, several measures related to public service spending are examined as independent variables to determine whether they are potential predictors of the Carnegie Community Engagement classification.

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable for this study is whether an institution was awarded the elective 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement classification. Institutions had to go through a rigorous application process in order to be considered. This study is only able to account for institutions that applied for and received the classification.

**Independent variables.** All independent variables used for this study are from the academic year 2009, which would have been the current academic year as the institutions were applying
for the classification. The first independent variable used for this analysis is a categorical
determination of whether the institution is a
land-grant college or university. Leaders at land-
grant colleges and universities have been working
to return their institutions to their roots and
give back to the state and communities in which
they exist (Kellogg Commission, 1999; National
Association of State Universities and Land-Grant
Colleges, 2008). Land-grant institutions have
a traditional commitment and service to their
states and communities, and therefore, land-
grant colleges and universities may be more likely
to be awarded the Community Engagement
classification.

One independent variable is related to
revenue; however, there are no national measures
of institutional revenue directly related to
community engagement. To fill this gap, this study
examines state appropriations to institutions.
State appropriations are related to community
engagement because links have been established
between institutional commitment to outreach
and engagement and state appropriations (Weerts
& Ronca, 2006). To control for differences in total
revenue among institutions, state appropriations
as a share of total revenue will be examined. Initial
analyses also included state appropriations per
full-time equivalent student as an independent
variable, but this was later dropped due to a high
correlation (0.85) with public service spending
per full-time equivalent student.

Two independent variables will be examined
that are related to spending. While no national
data exist that are dedicated solely to community
engagement, the Delta Cost Project does have
data related to overall public service spending.
Community-engaged activities are public service
activities, so they will generally be included in
these data. To control for variances in enrollment,
public service spending will be examined per full-
time equivalent student. Public service spending
as a share of total spending was initially examined,
but omitted from the final analysis due to high
correlations with other variables. The Delta Cost
Project also has data that track costs related to
public service. The final independent variable
related to public service spending is devoted to
human resources. This variable is the proportion
of total public service expenditures that are spent
on salaries and wages.

The descriptive statistics for each variable are
shown in Table 1. The Pearson correlation matrix
for the independent variables is shown in Table
2. Spearman’s rank correlation test was also run,
but the results are consistent with the Pearson
correlations and are not reported. Table 3 pro-
vides mean comparisons between the classified
and non-classified institutions for the indepen-
dent variables. As shown, the differences between
the means for these independent variables are all
insignificant.

Based on the variables, multiple logistic re-
gression models were used to estimate whether
an institution is classified as Community En-
gaged. Stepwise regression analysis was utilized
to build toward the final model. The first model
included the public service spending, the second
model added the two variables related to state ap-
propriations, the third model added the spending
related to human resources, and the final model
included land-grant status. The progression
of the four models is shown below:

Model 1: \( \Pr(Y = 1|X) = \alpha + \beta p\text{sspendfte} \) (public
service spending per fte)

Model 2: \( \Pr(Y = 1|X) = \alpha + \beta p\text{sspendfte} +
\beta \text{stateappshare} \) (state appropriations share)

Model 3: \( \Pr(Y = 1|X) = \alpha + \beta p\text{sspendfte} +
\beta \text{stateappshare} + \beta \text{sharepssalwag} \) (share
of public service spending on salaries and
wages)

Model 4: \( \Pr(Y = 1|X) = \alpha + \beta p\text{sspendfte} +
\beta \text{stateappshare} + \beta \text{sharepssalwag} +
\beta \text{lndgrnt} \) (land-grant status)

Several other independent variables available
from the Delta Cost Project were also initially ex-
amined, but were not used in the final analysis
because very high correlations were found. These
variables were eliminated in order to prevent
multicollinearity (Menard, 2002).

Methods of Analysis

Logistic regression is the primary, and appro-
priate, method of analysis for this study because
the dependent variable is dichotomous (Hosmer
& Lemeshow, 2000). The goal of logistic regres-
sion is to determine a maximum likelihood fit
for the data. In other words, the independent
variables are used to predict the maximum likeli-
hood of the dependent variable in the sample of
data being observed being true (joint probability
of \( Y_1 \ldots Y_N \)).
For this study, the following null and alternative hypotheses for the entire logistic model are designated below:

\[ H_0: \beta_1 = \cdots = \beta_k = 0 \]
\[ H_A: \text{At least one of the } k \text{ coefficients is non-zero} \]

The two-tailed hypotheses tests for each of the individual \( j \)-th variables determine if the independent variables have a significant effect on the dependent variable holding all other independent variables constant. For each \( j \)-th variable, the null and alternative hypotheses are shown below:

\[ H_0: \beta_j = 0 \]
\[ H_A: \beta_j \neq 0 \]

Findings

For the purposes of comparison, the findings from both logistic regression models are shown. Table 4 shows the results from the four logistic regression models, built stepwise toward the final model as described above. Results are presented in terms of \( \beta \) coefficients as well as odds ratios. As shown in Table 4, the results are consistent in terms of the significance of the findings.

The most striking result from the logistic regression analysis is that none of the models as designed for this study are good fits for finding the maximum likelihood of whether an institution was awarded the Carnegie Community Engagement classification (\( p > 0.05 \) in all four cases).

### Table 2. Pearson Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State Appropriations Share</th>
<th>Public Service Spending per FTE</th>
<th>Share of Public Service Spending on Salaries and Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations Share</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Spending per FTE</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Public Service Spending on Salaries and Wages</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Spearman’s rank correlation test was also run but is not reported as the results were consistent with the Pearson correlations.

### Table 3. Carnegie and Non-Carnegie Classified Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carnegie Classified ( (n=47) )</th>
<th>Non-Carnegie Classified ( (n=319) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Land-Grant</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Classified</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-Grant Status</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations Share</td>
<td></td>
<td>366</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Spending per FTE</td>
<td></td>
<td>366</td>
<td>1,265.50</td>
<td>6,227.87</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>116,698.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Public Service Spending on Salaries and Wages</td>
<td></td>
<td>366</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Logistic Regression Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Spending per FTE</td>
<td>β (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
<td>β (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations Share of Public Service</td>
<td>0.88 (1.88)</td>
<td>2.40 (4.52)</td>
<td>1.50 (2.93)</td>
<td>1.17 (2.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending on Salaries and Wages</td>
<td>β (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
<td>β (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-Grant Status</td>
<td>0.10 (2.32)</td>
<td>1.10 (2.11)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.16)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even in the final model, only about 2% of the maximum likelihood is explained, as shown with the progressive pseudo R² values. In addition, none of the subsequent models represents an improvement over the previous model, as none of the chi-square values were statistically significant. In addition to the entire model being statistically insignificant, each individual variable was also insignificant in each progression of the model. The Delta P method was used to approximate the probabilities of the variables for each model. The Delta P method estimates the overall change in the dependent variable (Cabrera, 1994). The Delta P estimates are shown in Table 5.

Based on the Delta P estimates, several elements stand out. First, in both models, the independent variable with the greatest impact is state appropriations per full-time equivalent student, although it is important to reiterate that this variable is not statistically significant in any of the models. Delta P estimates are useful for understanding the impact of independent variables in a logistic regression model; however, in this study, none of the independent variables are statistically significant in any of the models, so it is imprudent to use the Delta P estimates to say anything definitive about the independent variables’ impact on whether an institution is classified as community engaged.

### Discussion and Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the logistic regression models developed are not predictive of an institution applying for and receiving the Carnegie Foundation’s elective Community Engagement classification. These findings can have several important implications for policies at the Carnegie Foundation, institutions of higher education, and the state systems of higher education.

For the Carnegie Foundation, these findings indicate that a great deal of emphasis is placed in the documentation and reporting form. The application form is focused primarily on the actual practice of community-engaged work, not on the amount of money that has been allocated. Financial indicators and other quantitative measures play a role in the all-inclusive Carnegie classification system, but the elective classifications are intended to provide an additional level of insight into what colleges and universities do and “recognize important aspects of institutional mission and action that are not represented in the national data” (Carnegie Foundation, 2012). From this perspective, the initial findings suggest that the Carnegie Foundation has achieved this goal to a degree. By and large, the
nationally available data do not appear to serve a predictive function for an institution receiving the Community Engagement classification. It is largely the practice of community engagement that leads to being awarded the elective classification.

For the institution, there are also important implications that can be drawn from the findings. First among these is that those involved in community-engaged activities are often asked by the institution to do more good work with fewer financial resources. There is no clear and consistent connection between financial indicators and being rewarded for community-engaged activity by the Carnegie Foundation elective classification.

The Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement classification is just one way for a college or university to demonstrate its commitment to its community. Simply spending more money at the state level or the institution level does not necessarily mean that the institution is taking the necessary steps to fully commit to community engagement. For institutionalization to occur, engagement must become a priority on campus with a fully developed plan for achieving this goal that includes interdisciplinary activity and proper incentives for faculty involvement (Kellogg Commission, 1999). This study indicates that among the sample, more is at work in higher education community engagement than finances, and that institutions may be working toward achieving institutionalization at multiple levels.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by several factors. First, the Carnegie Foundation makes it clear that the Community Engagement classification is not intended to be comprehensive, largely because it is a voluntary classification (Carnegie Foundation, 2012). Institutions are not required to document their community-engaged work and apply for the classification. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that many colleges and universities are engaged with their communities, but have not taken the initiative to apply for the classification. This lack of comprehensiveness is further emphasized by the relative newness of the classification. The first cohort of colleges and universities designated as Community Engaged was named in 2006, and there have only been two subsequent classifications since then. As the Community Engagement classification gains traction in higher education, it is possible that more institutions engaged with their communities will apply for the classification. In addition, information is only available for institutions that applied for and received the classification. The Carnegie Foundation does not make available the institutions that began the process but did not submit a completed application, or the institutions that completed the process but did not receive the designation.

This study is also limited by the national data available for analysis. There are no national measures of community engagement, so this study utilized variables that are theoretically linked to public service, but may not paint a complete picture. For example, public service spending includes community-engaged work, but also a variety of other activities related to serving the public. Institutions may also have different reporting structures, and community-engaged work may not always be reported as public service work in the national data. Until there is mandatory national data available, a study like this will be limited by the availability of data.

Finally, this study is limited by the sample. Only investigating public four-year institutions leaves out private institutions and community colleges (and other two-year schools) that participate in community-engaged work. Many of these institutions have been awarded the Community Engagement classification, but because of the inherent structural differences, it is difficult to

Table 5. Delta P Estimates (Final Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>ΔP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Service Spending per FTE</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Appropriations Share</td>
<td>-2.31</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Public Service Spending on Salaries and Wages</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-Grant Status</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
make comparisons, especially when examining spending and revenue sources.

Conclusion

The Carnegie Foundation’s elective Community Engagement classification is an important first step in recognizing a greater variety of the work done in higher education that is not encompassed in the general Carnegie Foundation classification. It is an encouraging sign that the national data available through the Delta Cost Project is not predictive of an institution receiving the classification. This implies that the elective classification is indeed serving its purpose of telling a more complete picture of colleges and universities. If the national data were predictive, the Community Engagement classification would simply be telling the same story in a different way. Telling the complete story of higher education is important. Without being able to effectively communicate the full range of university activity with all stakeholders, institutional competitiveness can suffer, and mission drift can occur.

References


**About the Author**

Andrew J. Pearl is a doctoral candidate in the Institute of Higher Education and a graduate assistant in the Office of Service-Learning at the University of Georgia.

**Acknowledgement**

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Community as Agency: Community Partner Experiences with Service Learning

Paula Gerstenblatt

Abstract

The bulk of research on service learning has focused on student outcomes; however, there is a scarcity of research examining the lived experiences of community partners. Additionally, the few studies that exist to date involve agencies and have not included informal networks and civically active citizens. This study consisted of interviews with nine community partners, a combination of agency employees, and active citizens. All of the partners resided in a rural Southern town that worked with a network of service-learning classes on a variety of community-identified projects. The current study supports the contribution of service learning to communities, the importance of investing in reciprocal relationships, and the value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents. Recommendations for further research and strategies to support reciprocal and meaningful community engagement are discussed.

Service learning and its core principles of study, reciprocity, and reflection has gained prominence in higher education as a signature pedagogy that places equal value on mutually beneficial outcomes for students and community partners. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Harkavy, 2004). Service learning is one of the most valuable ways to support community-university partnerships and requires an investment in relationship building as part of collaborative problem solving (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). The bulk of research on service learning has focused on student outcomes, with little attention given to the communities with which they work (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010). Additionally, existing research on community partners does not include the perspective of informal networks or individual residents involved with service-learning students (Cress et al., 2010; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gray, Ondaatje, Fricke, Campbell, Rosenblatt, Geschwind, Kaganoff, Robyn, Sundt, Vogelgesang, & Klein, 1998; Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006). To address this gap in the literature, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to examine the experience of community members who worked with students on a variety of service-learning projects in a rural community.

The lived experiences of community members involved with service-learning students can assist in the further development of best practices that support mutually beneficial community-university partnerships. The research question that guided the study was: What was the lived experience of community members working with university service-learning classes? Phenomenology is a method that seeks to understand the meaning and essence of a phenomenon (Grbich, 2007). Therefore, this method is well suited to a study investigating the common experience of community members who worked with university students on projects to improve the conditions of their town.

Background

Very few empirical studies have focused on the impact of service learning on community outcomes or the identified community partner (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Research done to date indicates positive outcomes for the agencies involved with service programs; however, the literature is scant and dated and does not include informal networks or individual civically active citizens. Driscoll et al. (1996) conducted a comprehensive case study of four service-learning classes at Portland State University that used both qualitative and quantitative methods including surveys, interviews, and focus groups with community partners. As a result of participation in service-learning programs, community agencies perceived a positive effect on their capacity to serve clients, felt they had
received economic and social benefits, and were satisfied with student interactions.

Sandy and Holland (2006) conducted a qualitative study of focus groups with 99 community partners across eight California campuses. Partners discussed their perceptions regarding benefits to the academic institutions, the organization’s impact on student learning, and ways to improve the partnership. Community agencies identified ways that service-learning students contributed to client outcomes and the increased capacity of the agency to take on new projects. The community partners also expressed a dedication to student learning as a reason for their participation with service-learning classes (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

In a quantitative study, Littlepage et al. (2012) surveyed non-profit and religious agencies in two Indiana counties to learn about the ways community agencies use volunteer management tools and how they differentiate various forms of student involvement, including service learning. Service-learning students required more agency time than other volunteers because of the expectation of reciprocal benefits to students and the agency; however, they also reported the students brought other benefits such as increased visibility and client outcomes. Results also showed a willingness to continue to work with service-learning students (Littlepage et al., 2012). Similarly, in a mixed methods study by Gray et al. (1998), a majority of community organizations gave high marks to student volunteers and felt the benefits of working with students outweighed the costs.

One critique of service learning has been that the benefits to students outweigh those of the community (Beran & Lubin, 2012; Butin, 2010). Yet, research engaging the experiences of community partners working with service-learning students is scarce. This study addresses gaps in the literature by investigating the lived experiences of community partners that included both agency staff and individual residents who worked with university students.

Methods

The interviews were conducted with community members who partnered with university students on a variety of projects. In this study I was a participant observer, co-instructor of one of the service-learning courses, the founder and director of a community development initiative, and family member by marriage to several extended family members residing in the town. Located two hours away from our campus, the rural community has an estimated median household income of $32,000, a per capita income of $15,050, with 21% of the residents’ income below the poverty level. District wide, 74% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and 39.8% of children under 18 are living below the federal poverty level. While many residents contend with poverty and unemployment concerns, the African American neighborhood, still referred to as “black folk’s town,” has suffered the consequence of the economic decline more severely. The legacy of segregation is evident in the lack of African American representation in city government, community boards, businesses, and the school district where there are no African American teachers or administrators. In addition to the overall economic decline, there are few civic, cultural, or recreational engagement opportunities for youth and residents other than a variety of sports events. Youth centers and programs that provide social or recreational activities for young people are largely absent. Similarly, the elderly lack crucial support services, and there is no public transportation to the nearest major city 20 miles away.

The network of courses included electives in social work, writing and rhetoric, and art at a major university. Over a two-year period approximately 130 students from a range of disciplines worked in the town including social work, psychology, English, government, film, theater, engineering, political science, architecture, and art. Projects included a campaign to restore a historical building, a community garden, supporting an art co-op, a high school essay workshop, a teen social support group, writing a National Endowment of the Arts grant, a youth art exhibit, a public transportation project, establishing a subcommittee with residents and the City Council, an oral history project, design mapping projects, multimedia documentaries, public art projects, and a cultural enrichment program for young African American girls. Students worked with the library board, school district, churches, local artists, civically involved residents, and the African American Prince Hall Masons.

Interviews were conducted over a 4-month period. Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as a method of analysis to gain descriptions
of the lived experience of the community members working with a steady stream of university students—a first time experience for the town. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the interpretive role of the researcher. To address this, researchers are expected to contextualize the factors that influence their interpretations through a candid and rigorous process that includes descriptive audit trails, documenting assumptions and relevant experiences, peer readers, and extensive interviewing (Grbich, 2007). Having multiple roles in this project and town, adhering to these procedures in a transparent manner was important to maintain integrity. Phenomenology provides a rich and descriptive source of data and is well suited to better understand the meaning of the experiences of community members though their words and descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological inquiry helps researchers gain understanding of the essential meaning of lived experiences from participants’ perspective and descriptions; therefore, this method was employed in this study.

Participants
Criterion sampling was used in this study. The criterion was residency in the town and involvement with university students in at least one project over the course of one semester (n=9). Community partners worked with students on a variety of projects, often more than one at a time, and for more than one semester. The sample included the school district superintendent, high school principal, two high school teachers, a pastor/city councilman, local newspaper editor, and three civically active residents. The breakdown by gender and ethnicity was 67% female, 33% male, 56% white, and 44% African American.

Procedure
A semi-structured interview guide was designed to gather the community member’s description of the experience of working with the university students. The questions were drawn from the literature as well as my experience as a participant observer and comprised of nine items about the community member’s experience working with university students (see Table 1). I conducted the interviews, which lasted between 25–45 minutes and immediately after each interview I wrote field notes. The university Institutional Review Board for research with human subjects approved this study as part of a larger investigation of the impact of the community-university partnership in this town.

Data Analysis
All audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Procedures associated with phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) were used in the analysis. As a participant observer, I focused on the lived experiences of community members working with students. However, my position as the founder of the community development initiative, co-instructor of the service-learning course, and family member was taken into account through the phenomenological procedures of writing assumption statements, bracketing, writing field notes throughout the analysis process, and peer review. The steps of phenomenological analysis were as follows: (1) recording a list of assumptions about the community partners and their experience working with students; (2) bracketing my experience working in the community; (3) conducting a naive reading to absorb the entirety of the data; (4) reducing and eliminating data that did not pertain to the lived experience of working with university students;

Table 1. Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Project INTERVIEW GUIDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me a little about yourself? (age, race/ethnicity, community role, student rank).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How did you come to be involved with university students working on projects in your town?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tell me about the activity/project you were involved in with the university students. What was your role in this project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do you feel the students were received in the town?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What was their contribution to the town? Do you feel their contribution extended beyond the semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How would you describe your experience working with the university students? Do you feel as though you grew from this experience? If yes, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How did you feel when the semester ended and the students were no longer in the town?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How did working with the university students influence your thinking about your community? Did it change your perspective of your community in any way? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How has the town been affected by the university presence in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything else you want to share?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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(5) creating meaning units from the significant statements (Table 2); (6) eliminating repetitive and overlapping meaning units; (7) categorizing meaning units into clusters of meaning (themes); and (8) testing themes against the entirety of data (validated by the full text of transcripts). The reliability of themes was assessed with two peer readers familiar with the methods and topic.

The clusters of meaning resulted in the five essential themes. Table 3 contains an example of a theme cluster that emerged from their meaning units. The validated themes were used to write a textural description or “what” the participants experienced. Additionally, the themes were used to write a structural description of the setting and context – also referred to as the “how” participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). From the integration of the textural and structural descriptions, a composite description of the essence of the phenomena was constructed, synthesizing the common experiences of the group as a whole (Table 4).

Social construction provided a wider frame for this analysis and is well suited for phenomenological research (Grbich, 2007). Humans are constructing
meaning through interaction and experiences with their environment, inclusive of a historic and social perspective (Crotty, 1998). Constructionist research assumes subjectivity and that reality is not fixed, rather it is always in flux and experienced differently depending on the person and their perception (Grbich, 2007). Recognition and insight into the meaning making of the community participants contributes valuable knowledge for building effective service-learning practices and pedagogy.

Results

Five essential themes emerged from the interviews: (1) encouraging community involvement; (2) students as inspiration; (3) community learning; (4) community response to students; and (5) lasting imprint of students in the community.

Theme 1: Encouraging Community Involvement

As a result of working with the students on specific projects, community partners increased their involvement in the town’s revitalization and attempted to enlist others to do so as well. They discussed determination to overcome obstacles and use their social capital to ensure projects were successful. Participants in the study remarked on how their relationships with students had engaged them and others in the community; however, they expressed a desire to “see more residents involved in the community.” They also described how the demands of their lives at times prevented them from working with the students, for example, one said: “Due to health reasons I have been kind of out of touch. I am not in contact with what’s in the now. I want to catch up on things.” One community member spoke of his conflicting obligations and yet he still made time to work with students, saying:

[I haven’t] been able to go as much as I would like to due to work and activities. I have put as much as I can; I stop by and support and try to get people to go out and support what is going on. (Bill, pastor and city council member)

For some community partners, their involvement increased their determination to overcome obstacles,

After two years, I am the one looking for the different ways to make things work…. I don’t want them [students] to hit a roadblock now and I am the one trying to get them around the corner. (Jim, school superintendent)

The community partners recognized the value of relationships in encouraging community involvement, particularly in a small town, as one noted by saying: “They have done a really good job of working and interacting with people. That’s not easy. There is a natural distrust that’s overcome now, I really believe that.” The local newspaper editor spoke of using her position and platform to publicize the students and projects, saying, “I always promote them and help them. I am very positive as to what they are doing for us.”

Theme 2: Students as Inspiration

Community partners felt students inspired them to become more civically active, try new things, awaken the possibly of higher education for youth, believe in positive change, generate new energy and ideas, meet new people, and be more proactive. Community partners in the study described a newfound optimism for positive change. According community partner: “I see that we have something to build on; they [students] have shown us ways we can improve...”
and how we can get things to happen for the city.” One community partner spoke of how the students helped her recognize the potential of maximizing existing social capital, saying: “If you want [things to get better], there are plenty of people here that can make it better. I think the students and the whole program shows [the community] that.”

One resident spoke of how the students inspired her to “get out of her rut” and try new things:

If they never came I probably would never have gotten into this stuff here. I would just see myself coming home and cooking and just looking at TV. Makes you get up and go, constantly keeping you going…whereas when they came I enjoyed getting out because there were new people and I got to learn different things. (Sara, stay at home parent)

A community member described her renewed commitment to the community:

I couldn’t believe it myself because I am the change; these people have inspired [me] to where I know I am the change. There was a time I felt like I needed to get the hell away from here, married or not, because there was nothing here, dead, nothing here. But seeing the students come in with different ideas and listening to students here [in the town], seeing the smiles on their faces, changed my mind, saying you need to stay and do what you can. (Iris, community advocate)

Students working in the town inspired fresh ideas and new approaches. A community partner from the school district spoke of the “new perspectives” that students brought and the “propensity to be stagnant when you don’t have people from the outside come in and provide some input. Yeah, I think it stirred my thoughts.” All of the participants in the study spoke of how the university students inspired youth in the community to consider higher education as well as expose them to a world beyond the town. The high school principal described the university students as “a very positive impact to our students to say, no you can do it, you can go on to college.”

The local newspaper editor articulated her decision to involve her work more directly with the students:

I [began to] think that my energy and my thinking could actually make a difference of changing something, trying to revive the chamber and do some projects, get some younger people into town. A lot of my deciding that it was possible to do has to do with my meeting the students and seeing they are interested in helping the [town]. (Carrie, local newspaper editor)

Theme 3: Community Learning

Community partners in the study described a number of ways they learned and grew as a result of working with the university students including meeting new people, becoming a better community advocate, youth learning about life outside of the town and the possibilities for college, technology, art activities, and teaching techniques. For example:

I grew from it. How I grew was getting to be around different types of people and get well versed in what they do, and just pick up on things. I have learned by looking and listen and seeing what’s going on. (Bill, pastor and City Council member)

For older community partners there was an opportunity to learn as well: “Even at my age I learned some things…experience I had was great.” Another active citizen spoke about becoming “more patient” at City Council meetings “because these things didn’t come about overnight, and they are not going to go away overnight, so I have learned patience.” A school district official noted: “I have learned a lot from the resilience of these students who come here.” School district staff and residents spoke repeatedly about the learning benefits of youth in town, specifically about working side by side with university students and visiting the campus. They all felt that the relationships they formed, participating in projects, and having local high school students visit the university campus exposed the youth in town to the possibility of attending college, and “allowed students to be on a university campus that otherwise wouldn’t have gotten the opportunity.” Another area of learning
that was attributed to the university students was knowledge about technology, particularly for school district staff, for example:

I am just now embracing technology in education for the classroom. To also realize that it is here to stay, and that we might as well now set up Facebook for high school is from listening to [the university student] and just knowing that it’s here to stay. He helped me get rid of some of my fears of technologies.

(Lori, high school principal)

A high school teacher described his professional development as a result of working with the university students:

When you are a school teacher you spend so much of your time within these four walls … it was neat to get out and see what’s happening beyond here, some of the new trends, particularly talking with [the university student] about the digital revolution and media. … I was really impressed with the energy that the university students brought to the town. The whole concept of the blog … . I know on our campus we have a couple of teachers who are incorporating blogging into the curriculum. (Brad, high school teacher)

Increased civic mindedness was not only for the adults in the community. As one said, “It’s given them [youth] outlets for their creativity and their particular skills and they are thinking in terms of public service and higher education, when perhaps before they might not have.” Another teacher who worked with a university graduate student in her classroom over the course of an academic year spoke of her professional growth: “If nothing else, it gave me a few more tools in my arsenal to teach. It was really good.”

Theme 4: Community Response to the Students

When asked about the community’s response to the students, participants in this study expressed appreciation and a hope that students will continue to come to the town, and felt most of the community was in agreement. According to one, “I think they were received by most that I know with an open heart, open head, gracious and friendly.”

A member of the City Council spoke of those in power feeling their position compromised by the students’ presence and infusion of new ideas:

It shifts the balance all the way around. Everything should be on an even keel, but some people don’t see it that way. They felt like we allowed these people to come in and make things better and then others will be able to progress; then they will lose power. It’s a power struggle type thing, and it’s an ego type thing. (Bill, pastor and City Council member)

Resistance was expressed in a number of ways. For example, a school district employee talked of anticipating resistance from certain sectors in the community when he was first approached about the prospect of service-learning projects and a new university presence in town, saying, “I knew they [people with power] would be apprehensive and unhelpful. I think they were and they still are, and the people that I thought would be open and ready for some change and hope were.” Despite what one community partner described as “naysayers,” the resistance to new ideas was something participants in this study saw being chipped away over time as trust was built. When asked what made the partnership and projects successful, one participant replied, “I would have to say trust.” Another community partner felt a permanent space would address resistance and increase involvement:

The one failure that we have had, and there is nothing we can do about it, I talked about this from the onset … I wanted a permanent home, a permanent base for this project downtown, so that when new students came, it … didn’t matter…. . If [certain] people could see some type of permanence, I think the people who are skeptical would be less so. (Jim, school superintendent)

Overall, there was a deep sense of gratitude
expressed by the community partners in this study for the commitment and contribution of the university students:

I haven’t seen anything really negative. It’s gotten people thinking, maybe even ideas that didn’t take hold, ideas that were mentioned at a city council meeting or chamber of commerce meeting I thought was wonderful that people from outside were actually giving us ideas that could actually be implemented here. (Brad, high school teacher)

A retired teacher who was active in several projects described her experience with the students, saying: “The students were there and we had a good time. They were up at the school working with the kids. We think that that was a wonderful thing.”

Theme 5: Lasting Imprint of Students in the Community

Participants spoke of student projects having a “lasting effect” that continues to live on. They also discussed the need for community members to “carry on, keep up the work” and “get enough people to fill in the gap” to ensure continuity after the semester concluded. There was a strong belief that “If you can reach a few people, it’s worth the time,” particularly when it came to the youth. The school superintendent spoke of the long lasting impact the university students had made on the school district students:

You know they are going to leave so it’s not a shock, but you don’t really leave when you leave the impression. You stay infinitely and you put thoughts in the minds of kids, things they would not have been exposed to. I think that you leave a little bit of a legacy when you reach a kid. (Jim, School Superintendent)

When high school students visited the university campus, school district staff and other community partners in the study spoke of the imprint it made on those who participated, for example:

They went to the campus and that made [for] a memorable experience to them. If we impact one it’s a success. Just that there is world outside the town – not that it is bad, but to really be a productive citizen, viable citizen, you have to broaden your horizons and experiences and that’s one of the avenues this program has offered kids that would not have the opportunity. That’s the essence of it. (Lori, high school principal)

A social support group started by university students for high school youth was a program frequently mentioned in these interviews as a successful program. Examples: “Students are still asking me today that were part of that group if they were ever going to start it back up.” “I have seen a smile on their faces [when they] talk about how their participation was [in the group].” “I would love to see that [social support] program continue, that really made an impression…it really made an impact.”

Youth frequently asked the community partners, particularly school district staff who interacted with university students, if the students would be back. They were told: “I just say next year is next year and there are budget issues we are dealing with them, and I said I can’t make any guarantees. There was a void though, knowing that it’s gone.” A high school teacher who worked with one university student over the course of the academic year spoke of having to explain to her students why university students would not return:

I do know that the students would [ask] when is she coming back, and I would say she’s not coming and they would say “What? Why not?” and wanted to know why she wasn’t coming back because she had become a part of them. (Susan, high school teacher)

The participants in the study spoke of a sense of loss they felt when the students left: “I miss them terribly when they go on and look forward to them being here every year. I will be extremely sad if you decide not to come.” Community partners expressed hope that a designated space for students would ensure their return: “I would love to see us use that space somehow to have you guys come in all the time.” Another community partner who worked on a variety of projects reflected on his experience with the students:

It’s just been a good journey. It could
have been better, wish it would have been, with more support from people that have authority and able to financially help. All together it’s been good; I would do it all again. If we started from scratch I would be right there on board. No matter that it’s a cliché, an old psalm they used to sing, “Ain’t no stopping us now.” (Bill, pastor and City Council member)

Discussion

A core principle of service learning is the establishment of reciprocal relationships that result in mutually beneficial outcomes for both communities and students (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Research on service learning has primarily focused on student outcomes with very few studies examining the community’s experience (Cress et al., 2010). The relatively few studies to date are informed by agency staff and have not explored the involvement of informal networks or individuals who are active in their community; therefore, this study engaged a wide range of community partners, school staff, civic organizations, agencies, and civically involved residents.

While previous studies that include community partners focused on their perception of the effect of service-learning students on their organization, clients, and the students themselves (Driscoll et al., 1996), agency satisfaction with students and ways to improve the partnerships (Gray et al., 1998; Littlepage et al., 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006), this study was concerned with the community partner’s lived experience and the meaning of having university students involved in their community. Findings from the current study suggest that communities partnering with service-learning students receive a range of potential benefits including increased civic participation, the opportunity to gain knowledge, inspiration to try new things, an infusion of fresh ideas and energy, and experience a lasting positive effect beyond the students’ time in the community.

The study’s results are limited to nine participants who were very involved in the partnership; however, there were many other residents who engaged with the students over the course of the three years. Restrictions of time and resources prevented increasing the number of participants, a second round of interviews, or focus groups. Future studies would benefit from a larger sample of involved community partners, and a longitudinal study to track the long-term impact of service learning and community-university partnerships.

The community in which this study took place is a small, rural town that has experienced a severe economic decline that has taken its toll on both the quality of life and infrastructure. Many residents lament the passing of a more prosperous time when the town was a thriving railroad and agricultural hub, and the condition of the infrastructure was attractive. Power, class, and racial divides run deep throughout generations, and often include a distrust of outsiders and their motives. The distrust expressed by some residents when we began this partnership has been discussed in the literature that indicates the benefits of service learning are focused more on the best interests of students and the university over the community (Ringstad, Leyva, Garcia, & Jasek-Rysdahl, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig, 2010). The arrival of the first cohort of university students was met with mixed reactions from a warm welcome and a feeling that help was on the way to skepticism and worry about broken promises. Over the course of two years, relationships were built and trust evolved. While participants acknowledged challenges such as the time limitations of the semester, the difficulties of enlisting community participation, and a void once students left, they felt the benefits outweighed the shortcomings.

Community members in the study increased their involvement as a result of working with students and made efforts to engage others in projects they worked on with students. One of the reasons they felt the projects and students were successful in engaging the community was the relationships students built with them and other residents. These relationships developed over time and eventually helped to minimize distrust and skepticism toward the students and the motives of university involvement. Participants in the study leveraged their position and social capital to encourage other residents to work on projects with the students. While students made consistent efforts to publicize projects and invite community participation, the community partners felt they were in a stronger position to convince neighbors, friends, and colleagues to get involved.

Students working in the community inspired
participants to “get out of a rut” to try new things and meet new people. As a result, community partners forged new relationships and became more optimistic about the possibility of positive change. They saw themselves building on the energy and commitment of the students, and “becoming the change.” The intention of service learning is not to do for but to do with. Through collaboration with the students, community partners began to see themselves as the ultimate change agents whose bore responsibility for carrying on the work. Participants in the study were most impressed with how the university students exposed youth in the town to the possibility of attending college and venturing beyond the rural town through project activities, including visits to the campus.

While research has demonstrated a variety of ways students grow and learn as a result of participation in service-learning experiences (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Finley, 2012), the current study suggests non-student participants increase knowledge and personal growth as a result of engagement with university service-learning programs. For some it was overcoming a fear of technology and learning new skills they applied in their professional and personal life. Teachers discussed new pedagogical methods modeled by the university students that they later employed in their classrooms, such as blogging, communication exercises, and technology. In addition to learning new skills and techniques, participants spoke of improving their ability to advocate through their work with the students, particularly by developing more patience and resilience.

While the participants in this study expressed appreciation for the university students, and generally felt the town’s reception to them was welcoming, they spoke of a resistance toward the students by certain members of the community. Resistance was attributed to fear of the unknown, lack of awareness, long-standing power disputes, and small town mistrust of outsiders. There was a degree of anger and frustration when the participants spoke of the resistance; however, it was not unexpected or something they had not encountered before in other civic or professional efforts. Despite the resistance, participants overall felt the town welcomed the students and valued the projects’ contributions, particularly for the youth.

One of the challenges of service learning is the eventual departure of students when a semester concludes; however, the duration of a relationship is not always the indication of its value (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Participants in the study responded to questions about the semester timeframe and the number of students coming and going, specifically if it was worth them being there even though they would leave at some point. While they recognized the drawbacks of forming attachments with students and the possibility that much needed programs may not continue, participants felt the work and presence of the students lived on in a positive way. For participants in this study the value of working with university students transcended a particular set of outcomes; rather they spoke of an imprint that could positively shape one’s life or even the direction of the town. Participant comments also speak to several related criticisms of the artificial timeframe of the semester, including insufficient time to engage with community partners, lack of ability to transfer knowledge (Tyron, Stoecker, Martin, Seblonka, Hilgendorf, & Nellis, 2008), trails of unfulfilled promises, and a sense of abandonment in the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig, 2010). This study suggests that community members felt engaged with the students, having learned enough from the experience to go forward, realized a sense of completion, and with an understanding of the fitness of the students’ departure.

**Conclusion**

The current study supports the value service learning offers communities and underscores the importance of investing in relationships with community partners. Additionally, the study also elucidates the potential value added of including community partners who are members of informal networks and civically active residents to service-learning experiences and research. Further research is needed to build a useful understanding of the lived experience of community participants in service-learning projects, and might include focus groups, arts-based methods and multimedia documentation, and longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effect of this type of community-university partnership. Qualitative research methods that utilize a variety of data points, including personal and archival documents, allow for in depth
investigation that captures nuance and provides social, cultural, and historic context. This is especially important in working with diverse populations that have been marginalized and overlooked.

The study supports the importance of relationship building with a range of community partners and paves the way for future research that delves into the meaning and impact of relationships between students and their community partners and the potential for sustainable civic engagement despite the inevitable departure of students at the end of the semester. Additionally, the findings make a case for long-term investment in the time consuming activities required to develop reciprocal and authentic partnerships. Such understandings will assist in the development and support of best practices for engaging the community in service learning programs and address gaps in research about community partners.

The results of this study suggest that the community gained direct benefits when students engaged informally with individual community members in addition to the formal institutional/agency based engagement. Those benefits included increased civic participation, gaining new knowledge and skills, inspiration to try new things, new ideas and energy, and recognizing a positive effect beyond the students’ time in the community. Additionally, this study can inform service-learning pedagogy by encouraging faculty to dedicate sufficient time to exploring the pitfalls as well as advantages of working in communities. This implies not focusing solely on project outcomes or learning objectives, but rather on how the value community members place on getting to know students and the inspiration and impetus they provide can last after the semester is over. Recommendations for increasing the benefits of service learning for community-university relationships include the intentional provision of opportunities for informal relationships between community members and students, as well as recognition of the meaning making of community partners as an important project resource.

References


About the Author

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University and high school students are shown here working on a variety of mapping projects in an art and design class. The high school students traveled to the university and the university students traveled to the town (an hour and a half away) several times over the semester to on work on joint projects.
Planting the Seeds for Change: A Case Study from York University’s Knowledge Mobilization Graduate Student Internship Program

Naomi Nichols, David Phipps, and Walter Johnstone

Abstract

This practice-based article describes the academic and non-academic outputs and outcomes of community-academic research collaboration. The collaboration began with a university-sponsored knowledge mobilization internship. A doctoral student spent four months as a knowledge mobilization intern with a youth shelter. With additional funding, the internship evolved into a multi-year collaboration that positively influenced employment opportunities for local youth workers, the shelter’s economic stability and reputation in the local community, young people’s sustained transitions out of the shelter, and academic growth and development on the part of the doctoral student.

There is consensus in the literature on community-engaged scholarship that community-academic collaborations have the potential to stimulate positive social change (Pearlman & Bilodeau, 1999; Roche, 2008; Research Triangle Park, 2004; Office of Community-Based Research, 2009). The term “engaged scholarship” encompasses any strategy or activity that fosters engagement or collaborative relations across academic and non-academic settings. Community-informed, collaborative, and participatory research approaches are central to engaged scholarship, but engagement – in its broadest sense – is not limited to research-related activities. Service-learning opportunities, bridging organizations, resource and asset-sharing structures, community-academic colloquia and knowledge sharing ventures, capacity-building opportunities, shared advocacy initiatives, and public forums/debates represent other activities that can contribute to mutual learning and engagement across institutional settings.

The literature is less clear about how specific engagement strategies engender positive social, cultural, economic, or environmental change. For example, while the implementation of a service-learning component in a post-secondary education program is seen as a way to institutionalise a partnership between an academic institution and a community organization (Eckerle-Curwood, 2011; Vazquez Jacobus, Baskett, & Bechsteinb, 2011), questions remain about the impact of students’ short-term involvement in community settings. Service-learning opportunities require significant investments (for training and supervision) on the part of community organizations. A short-term commitment between a student and an organization does not necessarily engender the conditions of mutual trust (Pearlman & Bilodeau, 1999) that are required to support impactful change (Northmore & Hart, 2011).

For senior graduate students (e.g., doctoral students embarking on their dissertation research), however, short-term involvement with a community organization can set the stage for ongoing collaborative research and the generation of mutually beneficial knowledge. With sufficient funding (Austin, 2003; Cherry & Shefner, 2004; Flicker & Savan, 2006; Israel, Schultz, Parker, Becker, & Adam, 1998; Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Isreal, Softley, & Guzman, 2001) and support from a community outreach partnership center or community engagement office (Cherry & Shefner, 2004; Hart & Northmore, 2011; Northmore & Hart, 2011), collaborative relationships between graduate students and community professionals can indeed influence positive social change.

This article explores the impacts of a 16-month (2007–2008) research and knowledge mobilization partnership between an emergency shelter for youth and a doctoral student at York University. The collaboration began with a four-month knowledge mobilization internship, which was coordinated and sponsored by York University’s Knowledge Mobilization Unit. Subsequently, the doctoral student received a Can-
ada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which allowed the collaboration to continue beyond the initial internship.

York University’s knowledge mobilization internship is distinct from traditional service-learning opportunities. The internship has an explicit emphasis on the co-production of knowledge relevant to community and academic purposes (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006); it is a paid work opportunity, rather than a credit-based learning opportunity; and it expressly targets graduate students. While the internship program differs from traditional service-learning opportunities, it also seeks to accomplish some of the same objectives. The internship program provides graduate students with an opportunity to: apply theoretical and/or research knowledge in a workplace setting, provide a service to the community, and learn with/from community professionals and community members (Hynie, Jensen, Johnny, Wedlock, & Phipps, 2011). While service-learning opportunities and paid internships both fall under the umbrella of engaged scholarship, they employ distinctive mechanisms in support of engagement between community and academic stakeholders.

The Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University provides services to faculty, students, and their non-academic research partners that support collaborations and the co-production of research so that research can inform decisions about public policy and professional practice (Phipps, Jensen, & Meyers, 2012; Phipps, 2011). The staff recognizes that the long-term impacts of knowledge mobilization are not always immediately visible to stakeholders. In order to capture the wider impacts of the knowledge mobilization internship program, staff members have been following up with internship participants in order to engage them in discussion about the immediate and longer-term effects of their collaborative activities. One key observation from these follow-up discussions is, while internships have resulted in scholarly outputs (e.g., conference presentations and academic articles) on the part of graduate students, the outcomes (i.e., local changes) and impacts (i.e., broad social changes) of collaborative activities are experienced in the communities where the internships were situated. The internships represent one of a number of drivers of a particular social change.

As such, qualitative research conversations are an effective means for capturing the various social, economic, and political context features, which also influence the efficacy of any collaborative endeavor.

This paper conveys the non-academic and academic outcomes of a knowledge mobilization internship and subsequent collaboration between Nichols (York University) and Walter Johnstone, executive director of the Youth Emergency Shelter of Peterborough in Ontario, Canada. It explores the wider influence of the collaboration on the economic stability of the shelter, training opportunities for community college and undergraduate university students, labor market conditions in the youth sector, and life outcomes among young people who are homeless or precariously housed. It concludes with key recommendations for a) graduate students; b) leaders of community-based organizations; and c) university knowledge mobilization or engaged scholarship units.

Assessing the Impacts of Knowledge Mobilization

Traditionally, knowledge transfer refers to the dissemination and uptake of research knowledge in policy or practice – that is non-research settings. More recent conceptualizations of knowledge mobilization reference the multidirectional exchange of knowledge between diverse stakeholders (e.g., institutional decision makers, researchers, community members, policy makers) (Bennett & Bennett, 2008; Nutley, Walter, & Davis, 2007; Cooper & Levin, 2010). The York University knowledge mobilization internship program was intended to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange processes between faculty members, graduate students, and people who work in community, non-profit, or non-governmental organizations. The organization also brokers relationships with government and private sector organizations.

The knowledge mobilization internship program has been in existence since 2007. Each year, the university funds a number of these graduate student internships in community and non-profit organizations, hospitals, public institutions, and environmental organizations. The goal is to develop students’ research and knowledge mobilization capacities, while simultaneously fulfilling the knowledge needs of various non-academic sectors. To date, the internship program
has supported 40 graduate student internships in a wide variety of organizations. A recent evaluation of the university’s knowledge mobilization programs (Hynie et al., 2011) indicates evidence of knowledge co-creation between faculty, students, and non-academic partners. Non-academic partners increased research skills as a result of partnership activities. Students report gaining a variety of new skills and, in some instances, increased labor market participation. The increasing numbers of applicants for the internship program indicate increased interest in knowledge mobilization among academic and non-academic partners. Moving forward, evaluation participants expect to see further returns from their participation in the internship.

A review of the literature on assessing and supporting university-community engagement reveals few standardized assessment tools or outcomes-focused evaluations (Hart & Northmore, 2011). While university benchmarks and performance indicators have been developed to measure socio-economic and cultural contributions, these have not yet been linked to a systematic evaluation of community-engagement strategies/activities. Further, the benchmarks fail to adequately capture community perspectives on evaluation activities. Hart and Northmore (2011) suggest that the paucity of outcomes-based evaluation of engagement may be linked to timing. A long-term timescale would be required to capture higher-level institutional outcomes and broader social or community-level impacts.

In contrast to community development, which is understood as service to/for the community, community engagement is a reciprocal relationship based on reciprocal social, political, and institutional relations (Pearce, Pearson, & Cameron, 2007). As such, evaluating engagement requires more than a quantitative (numeric or economic) measure of the work. Pearce et al. (2007) suggest that rigorous qualitative methods (i.e. interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and questionnaires) as well as the implementation of simple output data-collection systems can be effectively used to track engagement outputs over time.

In order to explore the longer-term effects of the knowledge mobilization internship program, the executive director of Research & Innovation Services at York University (Phipps) has been conducting follow-up telephone interviews with former knowledge mobilization interns and the community, non-governmental, or non-profit agencies with whom they worked. In June 2012, Phipps, Johnstone, and Nichols engaged in a conference call to talk about Nichols’ 2007 knowledge mobilization internship with the Youth Emergency Shelter. The focus of this conversation was the changes, which Johnstone and Nichols observed as a result of their collaborative activities. Subsequent sections of this paper explore the various changes Johnstone and Nichols attribute to the internship and the additional 12 months of collaboration that followed it.

**Shared Goals for Collaboration**

A clear description of the internship’s central problematic – that is, the research and knowledge mobilization issues it sought to address – is central to our ability to convey the project’s impacts. In Ontario, Canada young people are considered “independent minors” when they live outside the care of parents or guardians and are between 16 and 18 years of age. Until they are 16 years of age, the province’s child protection system is responsible for providing care and guardianship to young people who require permanent or temporary care outside their familial homes. Once they are 18 years of age, they are no longer considered minors. The two-year gap – between 16 and 18 years of age – is a particularly vulnerable time for young people.

Services for youth have been designed for young people who live with, or have the support of caregivers; services for adults are not designed to accommodate the learning curves of newly independent youth nor their urgent and evolving service needs. Where services for independent minors exist (e.g., the Ontario Works [OW] social assistance system has an application process designed for approving and monitoring funding for applicants/beneficiaries who are between 16 and 18 years of age and live outside the care of a parent or guardian), the application and monitoring processes require considerable institutional literacy on the part of applicants. Further, service utilization requires that young people adhere to strict eligibility criteria and engage in relations of compliance with service delivery organizations. For example, in order for young people to maintain their eligibility for OW, their school attendance records and bank accounts are monitored to ensure ongoing eligibility for benefits. In addition, they must
attend regular meetings with an OW worker as well as bi-weekly monitoring meetings with a community service worker (Nichols, 2008; forthcoming).

Establishing Grounds for Collaboration

Nichols started doctoral studies in 2006. She wanted to engage young people in a social change-oriented investigation of public and social services, which began with their experiences living as independent minors in the community. Her goal was for young people to engage in participatory research in the institutional settings where they were actively attempting to get their needs met. In this way, they would learn how the different systems worked and point to specific policies and programs that do not work for youth living independently in the community. When a call for applications for a four-month knowledge mobilication internship came across her faculty listserv, Nichols decided to look for an institutional partner with whom to submit an application.

Having just returned to live in the small city where she was raised, Nichols had limited familiarity with the human service sector and relied on social networks to make a connection to a local youth-serving agency. A family friend and professional colleague offered to introduce her to the executive director (Johnstone) of the local youth shelter (The Youth Emergency Shelter [YES]). Nichols met with Johnstone and explained the nature of the internship. She shared her own research interests and asked whether Johnstone had research, policy, or program needs that a knowledge mobilication internship could support.

Right from the start Johnstone and Nichols sought to identify mutually beneficial target outcomes – that is outcomes that would satisfy Nichols’ research interests and doctoral program requirements, Johnstone’s fund-seeking needs, and their shared desire to influence better institutional outcomes for young people living outside the care of parents or guardians. Young people’s ineffective engagement with human service institutions is an issue that many youth-serving professionals identify impacting the life outcomes of young people who are homeless, street involved, and/or precariously housed. In addition, staff at the shelter had been collecting demographic data during shelter intake processes (i.e., where a young person requests admittance at the shelter), but these data had not been collated or analyzed. As such, the data were not being used to support the shelter’s ongoing fund-seeking work. Johnstone identified that the organization and analysis of internal data would be an additional outcome he would like to see from a knowledge mobilication internship.

Nichols went home that night and began writing a research and knowledge mobilization plan that would address the following questions: 1. Who is accessing the Youth Emergency Shelter, and for how long? 2. What other institutions are shelter residents engaging? 3. What knowledge do residents have about accessing social, public, and community services? How can this knowledge inform service provision? 4. What knowledge do residents need to more positively facilitate their engagement with social services and/or various public institutions?

The internship was intended to generate knowledge that would increase the efficacy of young people’s engagement with human service organizations. Johnstone and Nichols hoped the internship would be a catalyst for knowledge mobilization among young people and between young people and service providers. The ultimate goal was to use this knowledge to support better social outcomes among young people who are homeless or precariously housed.

Collaboration Facilitators: Funding and institutional support

Johnstone and Nichols were awarded four months of internship funding in the spring of 2007. Also in the spring, Nichols received a three year doctoral fellowship, which would begin that fall. In order to support Nichols’ ongoing academic writing and conference participation and the time needed for her to establish trusting relationships with shelter staff and youth, she and Johnstone planned for her to spend three days per week at the shelter for four months and then continue to spend two or three days per week throughout the fall term.

In the end, the partnership proved so fruitful that Nichols remained deeply involved in shelter activities as a volunteer researcher, grant-writer, program-developer, and staff educator until the end of the following summer, 2008. At this point, Nichols began a two-year term as a volunteer board member on the shelter’s board of directors. In the next sections, we recount the details of partnership activities – that is, the collaborative
process – and explain how these activities led to key outcomes and ultimately created impact in the community.

**Collaborative Activities**

Collaborative activities began with relationship building between Nichols and shelter staff, youth, and administration. Nichols shadowed the shelter workers and learned from them about their interactions with youth. She participated in the shelter’s recreation program, going climbing at the local climbing gym with youth and serving as a volunteer lifeguard for a youth summer day program. The first four months enabled participant observation and key informant research on the part of Nichols. All of these research activities were grounded in ongoing discussions with Johnstone and other professional leaders in the community (e.g., senior leaders at the local Youth Services Organization).

During interviews with shelter workers, Nichols discovered that one of the workers was already aggregating the shelter’s intake data. These data were then made available to Johnstone for his fund-seeking purposes. Interviews with shelter workers also fundamentally shaped how research findings were mobilized. Shelter workers expressed concerns that the shelter no longer provided programming to support life-skills learning among youth. As such, they observed what they described as a “revolving door syndrome,” where the same youth cycled through the city’s social services. Nichols discussed this finding with Johnstone, who explained how municipal funding formulas shape the shelter’s ongoing economic difficulties and precluded a solution within the shelter’s existing funding programs.

*Using Research to Identify Knowledge Mobilization Needs and Resources*

The shelter’s funding relationship with Ontario Works and the city means that it receives all of its funding on a per diem basis (i.e., when a bed is full). Further, the funds that it receives only cover two-thirds of the cost of an occupied bed. A relationship with the local child protection agency (the Children’s Aid Society or CAS) makes up for much of this funding shortfall. At the time of the internship and subsequent collaboration, the shelter provided temporary and semi-permanent housing to the region’s “hardest to house” youth in CAS care. In order to reserve the shelter’s entire first floor for CAS-involved youth, CAS paid for the beds whether they were occupied or not. The relatively stable nature of this funding allowed the shelter to ensure that there were at least two paid shelter staff at all times. But neither CAS, nor Ontario Works funding were enough to pay for programming for youth. As such, placement students from the local college or university, volunteers, and other local service providers (e.g., public health nurses) offered programs and activities on an ad hoc basis.

All of the shelters across the province are funded using the same formula (although most will not have the additional influx of funds from child protective services). In order to provide more than a bed and a meal, shelters have to engage in extensive program-based fund-seeking work. Given that Nichols had studied Revenue Canada legislation for charitable organizations and Ontario’s non-profit funding regimes as part of her master’s thesis work, she and Johnstone determined that they should collaborate on a research proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The goal was to seek support for a life-skills learning program for shelter youth, a need identified by the shelter staff as previously mentioned.

Nichols began by examining existing programs and assessment devices. In most instances, standardized paper-based life skills evaluation tools were used to assess young people’s knowledge of predetermined life skills (e.g., whether a youth knew the correct temperature for ironing a cotton shirt). Given Nichols’ preliminary research (e.g., participant observation and in-depth interviews) with youth at the shelter, she could see that existing assessment devices would not elicit robust descriptions of young people’s knowledge. A multi-paged, pen and paper-based assessment would have been excruciating for most of the youth who used the shelter. Many had not progressed very far in school and school participation became even more difficult when they were experiencing periods of homelessness or housing instability (e.g., when they had to leave the city where they were attending school to stay at the only youth shelter in the five county area it serves). A number also reported having learning disabilities. More troubling, however, was that the standardized indicators of life skills knowledge did not account for the diversity of non-standard knowledge and skills young people brought to the table, nor did they allow them to self-determine their learning goals.
In terms of existing life skills programming, most programs used a group-learning model. As with the standardized assessment protocols, instructors predetermined life skills learning objectives, and they did not take into account the diverse experiences/needs of participants. Some youth had been feeding their families since they were themselves young children. Others had been caring for younger siblings. Still others were exceptional managers of small budgets (ending up at the shelter after an eviction for other reasons, e.g., drug use). The content of the life skills programs Nichols observed did not take young people’s prior learning into account; nor did the program processes attempt to mobilize knowledge among youth.

Working collaboratively with an educational assistant at the alternative school, which adjoins the shelter, Nichols drafted a summer program to support life skills learning among youth in the care of CAS. This program was rooted in the principles of experiential and peer-to-peer learning. Young people had substantial opportunity to collectively determine the specific foci of their program. Ultimately, the outline for this summer program was transformed into the Transitioning Life Skills program, an individualized life skills program designed for each youth and carried out between a young person and his or her mentor.

The assessment process involved an interview with a program coordinator, a role Nichols took for the first few months. The interview revolved around a series of conversation topics. Young people were invited to share their prior learning, experience, and goals for a number of life skills areas (e.g., education, healthy relationships, housing, cooking, and healthy eating). The content of these interviews informed the development of individualized life skills plans for each youth.

**Seeking Funds**

In order to implement the program, Nichols sought three years of seed funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, a grant-making agency of the Government of Canada. As a former educator, Nichols was confident in her ability to develop a sound social-educational program, but required Johnstone’s considerable financial management experiences and institutional leadership to devise an appropriate financial plan for the program. A key component of the application is the development of an itemized budget and a compelling budget justification.

Working collaboratively – and with input from a Trillium granting officer – Johnstone and Nichols developed a financial structure intended to produce a self-sustaining program within three years. The shelter would sell the program to local youth serving organizations (like CAS), using a fee-for-service structure. A fee-for-service structure requires other youth serving organizations to purchase the program for their young clients and would not only provide services to other clients but also provide a revenue stream to YES.

With sufficient enrollment, the program was designed to operate on a cost recovery basis. The program needed to generate enough revenue to pay for the youth mentors as well as a program coordinator. At the time of Nichols’ research, the shelter had no frontline leadership positions. There were frontline staff and an executive director, but given the executive director’s involvement in fund-seeking and managerial work, there was little ongoing professional development and mentoring of frontline staff. The Transitioning Life Skills Program was designed to a) support young people’s sustained transitions out of the shelter (i.e., reduce shelter recidivism); b) provide an additional income stream for the shelter; and c) create a frontline leadership position and ensure ongoing training for staff.

**Collaborative Outputs and Outcomes**

**Non-academic Outputs and Outcomes**

In 2008, the Ontario Trillium Foundation awarded the shelter $130,000 over three years to support the development and implementation of the Transitioning Life Skills Program. Johnstone and Nichols requested diminishing funding over the three years to support their goal of creating a self-sustaining program (due to increased numbers of fee-for-service clients) by year three of operation. In 2008, a program coordinator was hired, and fee-for-service contracts were established with the local CAS. Over the next four years, Ontario Works, the John Howard Society, Peterborough Youth Services, and other CAS agencies purchased the program for their young clients, effectively turning the Youth Emergency Shelter into a social enterprise. The Transitioning Life Skills Program and a work skills development program led to the shelter being named one of the province’s success stories in the 2008 Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Service’s, Breaking

A 2007/2008 Shelter Newsletter featured an article on the Transitioning Life Skills Program with excerpts from an interview with one of the first youth (Max) to participate in the program. In the article Max describes how he and Nichols – who was voluntarily acting as the program coordinator – “talked about whether I knew how to cook, if I knew about budgeting, if I had all the things I would need when I moved out.” Max explained that he “already knew about most of those things”; he went on to identify that what he “really need[ed] to know is how to keep my friends out of my house.” As such, he and his mentor created a plan for how to deal with someone who doesn’t want to leave his place. If his plan doesn’t work, he can call his mentor. “There is support there when I need it,” Max said, which was different from other programs he has participated in.

Although the program coordinator position has not been able to be sustained beyond the three years that were funded by Trillium, the shelter has employed program leaders, who act as youth mentors as well as team leaders, but without all of the additional responsibilities of the coordinator’s role. Fifteen youth workers (graduates from local community college programs) have been employed as mentors in the program, and the program has served 120 youth to date. These youth workers gain meaningful one-on-one youth work experience – experience that differs considerably from much entry-level frontline work with youth (e.g. traditional shelter work and group home work).

The shelter has not evaluated the outcomes of the program, but Johnstone indicates that he has observed two central changes resulting from implementation of the program. The first change is that young people develop close relationships with shelter staff in general, and their mentors in particular, that support their positive navigation of life’s “hiccups.” While the Transitioning Life Skills Program did not end recidivism, it has created a framework for supporting young people’s sustained transitions out of the shelter. It also reduced the average length of stay in the shelter from 37 to 28 days. While former shelter residents do contact the shelter in a crisis situation (e.g., seeking respite from an abusive partner), this brief stay or meeting is seen by the youth as one piece of a larger plan to remain living independently in the community. Johnstone notes that the goal of ending recidivism came from staff; youth, on the other hand, want caring adults and community supports that they can access over the long term. The program has addressed youth’s desires for accessible supports and caring adults. The second change is in the quality of the staff seeking employment opportunities at the shelter. Many child and youth work positions offer limited opportunities for youth workers to engage one-on-one with youth. Yet it is in the context of their one-to-one relationships with youth that youth workers describe observing the biggest changes among their clients. As such, child and youth workers with considerable experience have elected to work in the Transitioning Life Skills Program as a way to connect meaningfully with youth and see the day-to-day effects of their work. Recognizing the value of these opportunities for staff, Johnstone sought to include placement students from the local college social services programs in the Transitioning Life Skills Program.

The placement students job-shadow youth mentors, develop and lead programs and workshops, and participate in staff meetings. Upon graduation, the strongest placement students are offered employment opportunities as paid mentors within the program. In this way YES has created a training ground for potential future employees who are more prepared for shelter and youth work and has created a pool of more highly qualified personnel, benefiting not only YES but other social service agencies as well.

**Academic Outputs**

During her doctoral studies, Nichols published three article that convey findings from her research at the youth shelter. In 2011 she defended her doctoral research – an applied institutional ethnographic research project on service provision for homeless youth – and her dissertation won her faculty’s annual award for Best Doctoral Dissertation. Since then the research has informed an additional article, which has been submitted for peer review, as well as two forthcoming chapters in edited volumes. She also has a forthcoming book with the University of Toronto Press. Her doctoral research findings inform her teaching practice as an instructor of pre-service teachers and shape her continued research on the coordination of education and
other services for at-risk youth and community academic research collaborations.

Contributions to Social Impact

The collaborative relationship between Johnstone and Nichols, supported first by York University and later by the government of Canada, led to the creation of a social entrepreneurial venture that contributes to the shelter’s ability to hire and retain talented staff. It has also increased its public profile as a key provider of education and social supports – not just a bed and a meal – for homeless youth. YES has recently received $60,000 funding from Ontario’s Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities for the program, and Johnstone is currently undertaking discussions with another agency in Ottawa about the possibility of replicating the program there. The program has opened up a new funding stream for YES beyond the OW funding.

Additionally, the program offers young people a structure through which to pursue ongoing learning in the context of their rapidly evolving lives. Because of the close relationships they develop with their one-on-one mentors and other shelter staff, young people return to the shelter throughout their adolescence and early adulthood, often just dropping in to say hello or phoning to convey an update. The presence of stable and caring adults in their lives contributes to their abilities to live independently in the community, particularly when they encounter a hurdle or just need to talk. Furthermore, the program’s flexible and responsive structure has proven to be particularly effective with the community’s “hardest to serve” and “hardest to house” youth. These are young people with complex social-emotional, physical, and/or learning needs. Increasingly Johnstone observes that service providing agencies are paying to have these young people participate in the shelter’s holistic and individualized life skills program. This further contributes to the success of the shelter as a social enterprise. According to Johnstone, “None of this would have been possible without Nichols and the support of York’s Knowledge Mobilization Unit.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

Working in partnership, community organizations and institutions of post secondary education build capacity for knowledge mobilization among graduate students. An explicit focus on learning to engage knowledge mobilization processes enables graduate students to develop skills (e.g., communication, research application, and non-profit grant-writing) that further their scholarly careers and/or prepare them for labor market participation outside of academia. At the same time, the community organizations that host the internship benefit from the additional capacity to support areas such as research, data-analysis, and/or writing where they may not have sufficient capacity in-house.

While a four-month knowledge mobilization internship may not provide collaborators with enough time to enact a mutually beneficial knowledge exchange and social change agenda, it does provide a structure for ongoing collaborative activities at the inter-institutional level – that is, between a university and a community organization. Viewed from this perspective, individual knowledge mobilization internships represent phases of collaborative activities between the university and the community. Graduate students have an opportunity to apply their academic training and theoretical knowledge, and community organizations benefit from the students’ grounding in current theoretical knowledge and/or increase their organization’s capacity to generate/apply research.

As this article illustrates, internships also contribute to significant collaborative benefit when the collaboration extends beyond the four months of the paid internship. For graduate students hoping to engage in community development work or community-based research, the knowledge mobilization internship is a way to build relationships with various community leaders, learn about community members and practitioners’ research needs/desires, and co-develop a collaborative research agenda. For community organizations wanting to engage in evidence-based program development and/or grant-writing, a long-term relationship with a senior level graduate student can generate fruitful outcomes.

This article concludes with key recommendations for a) graduate students; b) leaders of community-based organizations; and c) university knowledge mobilization or engaged scholarship units.

Graduate Students

- Be prepared to compromise. In order to meet the needs of a community
agency, the people it serves, and your university’s degree requirements, you will need to be flexible in your research plans, timelines, and deliverables.

- You will learn more than you teach. Practice humility and openness in your interactions with community members, practitioners, and organizational leaders. They have much to teach you.
- If you want to pursue a community-engaged research agenda, consider doing an internship as a pilot project or a relationship building exercise with a community organization.

**Leaders of Community-based, Non-profit, or Non-governmental Organizations**

- Take seriously this opportunity to mentor the next generation of community-based researchers and knowledge mobilizers. Graduate students are primed for learning. A service-learning or internship opportunity represents a chance to train graduate students to work respectfully and responsively with community and provides access to potential future employees.
- Each discreet internship or service-learning circumstance represents an opportunity to build and sustain links between a community organization and an institute of post-secondary education. Rather than viewing an internship or service-learning opportunity as a one-off activity, these activities are more fruitfully understood as opportunities for ongoing collaboration for mutual benefit.
- Feel free to engage directly with your local university engagement unit and find out about the types of services it offers and opportunities for participation in knowledge exchange activities.
- Knowledge mobilization activities including internships is a way of accessing academic research to inform new programs and services and contribute to improving the lives of your stakeholders and constituents.

**University Knowledge Mobilization Units**

- Paid internships are important opportunities for graduate students to apply their academic training in non-academic settings. Research assistantships support graduate student development as researchers; knowledge mobilization internships support their development as users and translators of research knowledge and prepares them for valuable careers outside of academia.
- The coordination and oversight of a successful internship program is paramount to its success. A productive internship process is facilitated when the university offers training and supports for graduate students, coordinates payment, and ensures accountability to knowledge mobilization work plans.
- Knowledge mobilization is a process that supports research and knowledge based collaborations. Some of those collaborations produce innovative outcomes that have a beneficial impact on the lives of clients. Knowledge mobilization is a process that enables social innovation.

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About the Authors

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Two dark-skinned, lanky, attractive teenage girls stroll past the fishing village. They are supposed to be in school. The fishermen cannot resist taking notice of the girls’ full figures. They strut over to the girls, their words full of flattery and compliments, bringing them fish as gifts. The ultimate goal of these fishermen is to take advantage of the seemingly naive girls. To the fishermen’s dismay, the girls reject the gifts and stand up for themselves. Later, the girls meet some of their friends, who advise them to return to school and avoid walking past the fishing village. They declare: “A girl without an education is nothing.” (An example of a skit developed by Tanzanian girls we worked with, summer 2009.)

In the summer of 2009, we headed to a remote part of Tanzania to complete a service-learning project. As graduate students from the University of Georgia (UGA), we collaborated with local women leaders to implement a program for adolescent girls. Our work there originated out of the University’s partnership with Ambassador Gertrude Mongella, former district representative to Tanzania’s Parliament and past-president of the Pan-African Union Parliament. Ambassador Mongella began this partnership after receiving The Delta Prize for Global Understanding (http://deltaprize.uga.edu/), an award from UGA that recognized her as a strong advocate for world peace and one whose initiatives have brought greater understanding and cooperation between cultures and states.

Ambassador Mongella and the Tanzanian community identified several priorities in advance. The ultimate goal was that the community and the university participants would establish a long-term sense of trust and continue working together. Ideally, the local people would identify a need, and someone from the university with expertise in that area would agree to partner with the community to create a solution together. Students would also be part of the solution-development process, applying what they learned in the classroom to people in the real world.

Some of Ambassador Mongella’s priorities included girls’ educational achievement, career awareness, and personal development (Nickols, Mullen, & Moshi, 2009). We addressed those priorities through a service-learning project designed with a specific purpose: to provide adolescent girls with a safe place to discuss some of their personal challenges, ensure that girls understand their rights, make connections with other girls and women in their community, and together, develop ways to overcome some of the challenges they identified. A goal of service-learning is that it empowers participants to determine and meet their needs (Marullo & Edwards, 2008). Students do not simply enter the community, do a good deed, and leave; this ultimately changes nothing and likely benefits no one long-term. We approached the partnership from a critical service-learning perspective,
recognizing that we could contribute to social change and that this experience could potentially prompt a community response to injustice we were uncovering (Mitchell, 2008). Critical service-learning also possesses the mindset that community partners should be actively engaged in the design of the service-learning experience (Mitchell, 2008). We used Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to accomplish some of these goals, despite time constraints and language and cultural barriers. In this article we present some of the challenges faced by the local girls, barriers to working internationally, and finally, the usefulness of Theatre of the Oppressed for development work, particularly from a social work perspective. Also presented are lessons we learned as graduate students from the West working in a developing country.

**Historical Background: Why Girls Are a Priority**

In Tanzania for years, women and girls have not been valued or guaranteed the same rights as men. Historically, children were to be sources of help to their parents, and girls in particular were supposed to help their mothers with household duties and chores. As girls grew older, they were married off to “bring wealth to the family by way of bride price” (Omatseye & Omatseye, 2008, p. 163). Legally in Tanzania today, women are supposed to be equals, but in reality, women and girls are not yet treated equally in all aspects of society. Cultural practice still lags behind the law at multiple levels. For example, Ishengoma (2004) studied accessibility of resources by gender in the Morogoro region and found that “male dominance and control of resources limits women’s decision making, efficacy and productivity at household and societal levels” (p. 55). In another study, Muganyizi, Kilewo, and Moshiro (2004) reported that of 1,004 women interviewed in Dar es Salaam, 20% had previously been raped and that known perpetrators were responsible for 92% of those rapes (2004). Additionally, 50.5% of those raped reported a repeated rape.

One area where girls’ opportunities still lag behind boys’ is in their access to education. Girls are often required to take on a greater amount of household chores than boys due to cultural expectations of gender roles (Evans, 2005). This results in girls starting school at a later age than boys typically do, or girls not being able to attend school regularly, or not having sufficient time to study due to their heavy load of chores. This has a negative effect on girls’ educational performance. Sometimes girls are taken out of school at an early age, either to get married or because of an early pregnancy (Gilbert, 2004).

Huisman and Smits (2009) studied household- and district-level determinants of primary school enrollment for 220,000 children in 30 developing countries within 340 districts. They found that in most of the countries observed, there has been an increase in enrollment from the second half of the 1970s to the second half of the 1990s. However, of the countries studied, Tanzania was one of three where the opposite occurred. The situation in Tanzania worsened in the 1990s, with 14.3% of primary school aged boys and 24.8% of primary school aged girls out of school during the mid-90s. In 2000, an estimated 3 million, out of almost 7 million children were not enrolled in school (Ward, Bourne, Penny, & Poston, 2003). In 2002, the rate of females completing primary school in Tanzania’s Kilimanjaro area was only 62% (Vavrus, 2002). The problems facing primary education vary among regions but include “shortage of essential resources, irrelevant curriculum, late school enrollment, and lack of qualified teachers...poor learning environment and lack of confidence among parents in the relevancy and quality of primary education” (Education For All Report, 2000).

In response to such gloomy statistics, Tanzania developed the 2002 Primary Education Development Plan, creating strategies with a focus on enrollment expansion in primary school. By 2007, enrollment had reached 97% for girls and 97.6% for boys. However, this data do not take into account the very high dropout and repetition rates (Okklin, Leptomaki, & Bhalalusesa, 2008). From 2000 to 2005, according to Woods (2007), repetition increased more than three-fold for students in Standard 1 (first grade). Yet, Tanzania’s secondary education sector “has been one of the smallest in sub-Saharan Africa,” (Okklin et al., 2008, p. 66). Woods (2007) claimed the transition from primary to secondary school in Tanzania was the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. As well, after truancy, pregnancy was the second leading cause of dropping out of secondary school (Okklin et al., 2008). Finally, as the education level increased, so did the level of disparity between boys’ and girls’ achievements (Okklin et al., 2008; Woods, 2007). For example, in 2004,
75.7% of boys passed the Form 2 (secondary school) examination, while only 56.8% of girls passed (Woods, 2007).

Poverty is a major inhibitor of children's secondary school attendance (Ward et al., 2003; Woods, 2007). One of the reasons for poor performance in Tanzania’s education sector is that between 40% and 50% of the population live in severe poverty (Ward et al., 2003). According to Tanzania’s Education For All (EFA) report the poverty rate in the rural areas was as high as 60% (EFA Report, 2000). Sometimes children are withdrawn from school early to help contribute to the family income, or so that money going to school fees or supplies could be applied to other family needs (Gilbert, 2004).

But poverty does not impact all children the same way. When a household suffers from poverty or economic pressure, girls are usually the first to be withdrawn from school, especially secondary aged girls (Evans, 2002). World Bank researchers (Beegle, Dehejia, Gatti, & Krutikova, 2008) used longitudinal data collected in the Kagera Region of Tanzania (the western part, near Uganda) from the Kagera Health and Development Survey to study children's behaviors. They found that girls do an average of 2.5 hours more chores each day than boys. This difference becomes more pronounced as the girls age. They also found that participation in childhood labor caused a significant increase in the likelihood of girls’ marrying young.

Finally, in some school settings in Tanzania, as is the case all over the world, male teachers are guilty of sexually harassing their female students. “A girl’s refusal to have sex can lead to public humiliation, unfairly low marks, exclusion from class or corporal punishment” (Evans, 2002, p. 57). This creates a learning environment for girls that is more than just unfriendly: Girls are sometimes insulted, teased, discriminated against, and even beaten. This inequity and harassment clearly breaches girls' rights to education (Evans, 2002).

Legislation alone cannot bring true gender equity. Along with legislation, discriminatory mental and social attitudes toward the rights of women and girls can and need to be eradicated at the community level through advocacy, communication, education, and information (Annan-Yao, 2004). Society must see women and girls as equal in status to men and boys if girls are going to find equal opportunity in education, and ultimately in life.

As research indicates, many factors inhibit girls’ success in school and their ability to obtain their right to be educated. In the current project, we wanted to empower the local girls to challenge those factors. As stated, the purpose of our activities with the girls was to provide a safe place to discuss some of their personal challenges, make connections with other girls and women in their community, and together, develop ways to overcome some of the challenges.

Methods
Context, Setting, Etc.

The program was centered on an extremely isolated island located in Lake Victoria. Only two ferries visit each day. A ride from the mainland takes more than three hours.

We partnered with local women leaders to implement the program in an already existing club that focused on encouraging the positive development of girls. We conducted informal, unstructured interviews with some of the women leaders to gain a deeper understanding of the community and the practical issues the girls regularly face. Feedback from the women, along with the previous year's experience, subsequently informed the service-learning program. Additionally, we were not sure exactly what “personal development” included, but it was one of Ambassador Mongella’s specific priorities. The informal interviews helped us understand much of what was meant by “personal development” in the community; the women seemed to consider it to mean that girls would be prepared to know what to do when faced with many of their daily challenges (e.g., saying “no” to sexual advances of older men, staying in and working hard in school).

The women reported that one of the most common issues for girls in this community is early sexual activity, sometimes beginning as young as 12 years old (personal communication, June 1, 2009). Teen pregnancy is a common problem in secondary school, and once pregnancy occurs, girls commonly leave school and never return. Often, girls drop out of school due to too many chores, which do not leave enough time for school. According to the women, some girls drop out as young as age 10. It is also common for girls who become orphans to drop out. Once orphaned, survival becomes more important than an education.

The monetary investment it takes to be enrolled in school is another reason children drop out (personal communication, June 1,
2009). Though the government did away with school fees for primary school, students still have to purchase a standard school uniform and any supplies they might need. And all children have to pay secondary school fees. Some families cannot afford those fees.

The Team

We, graduate students from different disciplines, collaborated to implement the program. Hagues had her master’s degree in social work and was earning her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science. She had experience working with youth at summer camps and working with girls in impoverished neighborhoods in her hometown. As a young researcher, she was broadly interested in poverty and policy. Parker had formerly been a high school theatre arts teacher but had gone back to school to earn her master’s degree in Fine Arts and Dramatic Media. Our combination of skills was unique because of our varied, yet overlapping backgrounds and experience in working with adolescent girls. The background of both collaborators blended an integral mix of research and practice.

The Girls

The girls who participated in the program were from impoverished families. According to statistics from the World Bank, the Gross National Income in Tanzania was only $430 (U.S.) in 2008, and this likely was less for the people on the island because of their isolation. They only began to get electricity in 2005, and in 2009, the schools still did not have any. The participants had many responsibilities at home. Many had to walk a long distance to participate in the program, but every day they came. Some days more than 60 girls participated. They made sacrifices to be there. Ranging from as young as 7 years to as old as 18, most were in primary school, but a few secondary school girls participated. All wore long dresses or skirts and all except for a few of the older girls kept their hair closely shaven to their heads. Because of the short haircuts, it was often the dress that let us know that the younger ones were girls since they had not yet gone through puberty. Most of the girls at the beginning of the week were quiet and seemed shy, but a few were outgoing and sometimes even goofy. These girls helped lighten the atmosphere, which helped some of the other, shyer girls relax.

All of the participants were recruited by the women leaders with whom we were working. The program took place on the campus of a local school; school was not in session because the schools were on a short summer break.

There are strengths in the community that benefit the girls. Specifically, women leaders were meeting with the girls on a regular basis. Girls were valued, encouraged, and uplifted by these women. More and more strong female leaders are emerging from the community, some of whom have gone on to become teachers and politicians (such as Ambassador Mongella). The girls look to these women as role models.

The Program

In the summer of 2008, Hagues spent two and a half weeks with many of the same girls and women co-leading a similar program in 2009. Other students from UGA spent up to four weeks with the women and girls in 2008, so trust was already established with the women leaders and many of the girls before the 2009 program began. In contrast to the 2009 program, the 2008 program was adult designed and driven, and much of it was shaped before we arrived. The 2009 program was based on the needs the girls identified, using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (described later), and thus, allowed them to have a stronger voice in the program structure. For example, we asked open-ended questions such as, “Describe your life as a girl living in this community.” Many of the things the girls identified were challenges. Recognizing they were the experts on their lives and the changes they would like to see, we followed-up by asking, “What is something about life for girls in this community that you would like to see different? What needs to happen for that change to take place?” We wanted the girls to identify these changes; the girls knew their lives better than we did and we did not want to bring in a “West is best” attitude.

Girls wrote their ideas down together in groups, and then would be asked to demonstrate, through the creation of a short performance, both the current situation and the change they envisioned. The initial 2008 program laid a foundation that allowed much more to be accomplished in 2009 than would have been possible if we had just shown up in the community for the first time, implemented the service-learning program in a week’s time, and left.
The girl participants were adolescents. They were not only physically changing, but were making decisions that would impact the rest of their lives. The majority of participants ranged from as young as 10 to as old as 18. While growing up in a developing country may limit some of the choices these girls are able to make (due to lack of options, cultural expectations, etc.), some choices remain universal for all adolescents. During adolescence, a young person develops the capacity to think in new ways. She begins to think systemically about hypothetical situations, imagining the possibilities of who she can be, and develop the capacity to think futuristically, to plan, and to consider the consequences of her actions (Steinberg, 2005). Yet, an adolescent sometimes needs an adult’s assistance to imagine what is possible.

As the ability to reason, plan, and consider one’s self begins changing, adolescents are entering a stage of moratorium. This is the time when an adolescent is trying out different identity options (Low, Akande, & Hill, 2005). During moratorium, an adolescent may experiment with values, roles, ideas, etc., in an attempt to decide what is right for her. At the end of this time, an adolescent is thought to have achieved her identity (Low et al., 2005).

The adolescent stage of moratorium is an ideal time for adults to implement interventions into the lives of at-risk adolescents. Adults can provide adolescents with a safe place to “try on” the various identity options they may be considering. Providing a safe place for the girls to work through some of their challenges was one of the major goals of the service-learning program. Theatre of the Oppressed was used as a framework for doing that.

**Theatre of the Oppressed**

Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed encourages the use of drama and theatre techniques to “give people an alternative language to discuss, analyze, and resolve oppressions” (Low et al., 2005, p. 220). Use of Theatre of the Oppressed is compatible with service-learning in that both see the community members as experts on their own lives and the best people to develop solutions to their challenges. Those in the community who are there to serve may bring expertise or knowledge to the situation, but they are primarily there to collaborate with community members, not to bring their own outside solutions. Some would call this service-learning that is focused on “doing with” not “doing for” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Theatre can be a mode of life rehearsal (Boal, 1992). Using techniques such as Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, and Forum Theatre, Boal encouraged the people with whom he worked to reflect and evaluate as they learned about themselves, each other, and established community. These techniques invite participants to act out experiences, concerns, and cultural and community issues that may be more difficult to put into words (Blair & Fletcher, 2010). Our goal was to get the girls actively thinking about possible solutions to these issues, and either act them out, journal about them, or describe them to their audience (the other girls) after acting out the scene. According to Low et al. (2005), “…participants come to understand that if people want to make change, they must engage the problem and find solutions” (p. 220). Boal used drama as an expressive and communicative tool for various groups of people from a plethora of backgrounds who desired to bring change to a situation in which they were living. His methods remove any need for prior experience in performance, and sometimes are more effective when used with persons that are not skilled or trained actors. Many of his most practical methods and exercises are laid out in his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002), which proves a highly useful and relatable guide for facilitators from different disciplinary backgrounds.

Michael Rohd is a theatre artist and educator who believes “education is dialogue” (Rohd, 1998). Many Boalian techniques and games are incorporated into his own book, *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Method* (1998). While preparing for the program, we had the chance to speak with Rohd about using his techniques with the girls in Tanzania. His advice was to remain flexible and start by getting to know the girls and giving them a chance to get to know us before moving onto the issues or scenarios. Rohd mentioned that listening to the issues the girls brought up to find a way into a conversation about these issues, rather than imposing ideas and discussions, would build trust (M. Rohd, personal communication, April 29, 2009). This is what we were aiming to do. The program in Tanzania was designed using Rohd’s framework as presented in his book, which
outlines specific games and exercises to use over the course of a week-long workshop in a manner that builds trust and ensemble skills before creating what he terms “activating material” that sparks problem-solving dialogue and positive change. Trust is the basis for any group – and this was no exception. The girls had to learn to trust each other, the women leaders, and us in order to feel comfortable opening up about some very personal issues. The majority of the first day and beginning of each subsequent day began with playing games as a group, allowing the girls a rare opportunity to laugh together and have fun. After a certain comfort level was established, girls were able to open up about serious topics, at which point drama became a tool for the adolescents to use to explore possibilities, talk about issues they were dealing with, and find solutions to challenges they faced. While the girls were assisted in thinking about their options, ultimately they were in charge of the topics and the potential outcomes.

Boal’s and Rohd’s ideas can be used to provide adolescents with tools and opportunities to explore themselves in a safe place. Boal developed many games meant to build trust and develop group cohesiveness. Many of these games were used and sometimes tweaked to be suitable for the Tanzanian adolescents, such as “Columbian Hypnosis” and “Apple Dance” (modified to “Orange Dance”). For example, in Columbian hypnosis, partner A and partner B take turns exchanging roles as the “mirror.” The mirror must follow the leader’s motions and facial expressions. Both partners should take a turn at being the leader and being the mirror. In the orange dance (modified from apple dance), two partners put an orange between their bodies (arms, back, forehead, etc.) and dance or move. The goal is to keep the orange from falling to the ground.

These games focus on building relationships, getting to know each other, and establishing trust. They helped ease anxiety in the group so the girls could be themselves and have the freedom to communicate openly and honestly about their lives. Girls were also led to create journals where they could express themselves and respond to regular assigned journal topics that directed their thoughts and prepared them for the next days’ activities. Games, activities, and journaling also gave insight into the expressive possibilities of the group. They were able to form ideas that served as the basis for short skits and songs they eagerly developed and shared at the end of the week.

Results

The first day of the program, the girls were asked to write in their journals about things they liked about school, things that they feared at school, and some of the challenges they faced in attending school. The following day they discussed their responses in small groups and then reported to the larger group. Girls willingly shared challenges such as: male teachers “falling in love” with girl students and soliciting them for sex, lack of teachers or materials, receiving harsh punishment, and getting pregnant and as a result, being expelled from school. The girls were then divided into teams and asked to use these topics to develop a short skit that would tell the entire group about the challenge. It was only on the second day of the program that the girls developed these skits. They were able to do this because they were willing to be honest – and even vulnerable – in front of their peers and the women. This allowed us to not only talk about sensitive issues, but gave the girls the opportunity to take charge of issues they regularly faced and work through these issues to find solutions.

As the week drew to a close, the girls were again divided into groups and asked to develop skits that focused on changes they would like to see in their community. With a wide-open topic area and very little guidance, the girls came up with powerful messages to communicate to each other. For example:

• A girl begins the habit of skipping school. However, her friends track her down and encourage her to come back and to stay in school. The lesson communicated was: “good friends are those that give you good advice.”

• A woman challenges her husband because he is not able to meet the needs of his family, so he leaves home to look for food. While he is gone, the woman goes to look for money. In the process, several men pursue her, and she invites them (on separate occasions) into her home. Her husband finally comes home drunk, but the other men happen to be there and he discovers what his wife has done. The lessons the skit conveyed
were that married women should be faithful to their husband and not cheat on them, and married men should care for and provide for their families, not squandering their money on alcohol and not leaving their wives destitute.

- A girl is doing poorly at school. At the same time, older boys approach her with money for sexual favors. She refuses them on multiple occasions. During this time, she also realizes that she is not studying enough and decides to work harder in school. Her grades immediately go up once she decides to work hard. The lesson was do not be distracted by others, but focus on your education and you will succeed.

Discussion
The girls were willing to talk about heavy issues because they were in a supportive environment; they cultivated relationships with each other and with the women leaders who were present, and because of the established sense of trust from the previous year. Such success could not have happened if all of these factors had not been in place.

Many Lessons Learned
We went into the community expecting to primarily serve and teach, but came away with our own lessons learned. First, we did not expect that the women and girls would already be meeting together and be so well organized. Several local women were (and continue to be) heavily invested in working with the girls. The women even had officer positions (president, secretary, etc.) and designated duties. In the past, these women have given the girls lessons on HIV/AIDS, have taught them about the dangers of having sex with older men, and have encouraged them to continue in school. Because of the women’s investment, the girls already had a good foundation of knowledge that equipped them to think and strategize about how to overcome some of their daily challenges and face some of their trials.

We were also encouraged to see that drama is a very usable, effective, and empowering tool in programs designed to foster leadership and personal development with youth. In particular, when informed by Theatre of the Oppressed and given a safe place to express themselves, these school-aged girls were not only willing to share information about their lives, but were also able to develop and articulate solutions without much assistance from anyone besides each other. The girls identified with games involving rhythm and movement, and particularly enjoyed working in groups. In smaller groups, they readily disclosed many of the pertinent issues in their lives, and successfully illuminated them through improvisation, songs, and rehearsed performances.

Not only did drama prove to be an effective tool, but also a practical tool across language barriers. Though we had a translator from the community (with strong relationships with the local girls), there were days when, with only basic instructions, the girls were able to produce amazingly realistic, compelling skits that communicated a message, where language was not necessary.

Journaling was also a special activity for the girls. We brought paper, colored pencils, and supplies that the girls used to make journals. Because school supplies are expensive and hard to come by on the island, the girls treasured these homemade journals. Journaling gave the girls the freedom to express their ideas in writing which gave them a starting point when working in groups.

One surprise was how much the women leaders (who came regularly to watch and assist) respected us as graduate students. The secretary of their group came daily to take notes and document what was done. This was intimidating in many ways, but at the same time, it was extremely humbling. The women wanted to keep a record of what was done so that they could use some of the same tools later.

We were careful to include the women as partners, asking for their advice and input in the open-ended questions we asked in responding to the skits created. We recognized that while we were in the community short-term, ultimately these women who were invested in the lives of the girls were the ones who needed to be upheld as role models and mentors.

We would have been better prepared if we had studied issues of power across class, race, economic status, and in particular, taking into account colonialism and the perceptions of “the Other” that are still held on both sides – those of former colonialists and the colonized. This would have better equipped us to consider our own perceived power and would have helped us
recognize preconceived frameworks from which the women may have been operating (Heron, 2004). Such power, both given by the community and assumed by the students, may have had the unintended consequence of quieting some of the needs of the girls.

The last day of the program, the girls performed for the women leaders and us. The final performances were transparent and revealed some of the realities of their lives. While the language barriers may have hindered us from completely understanding what was said, the basic messages the girls conveyed through their performances were complex and understandable despite the language barriers. This depth of engagement and dialogue exchange was not anticipated due to the relatively short program length, but was a rewarding outcome that will serve as an impetus for future program success.

Potential Long-Term Impacts

This program could potentially impact the girls for years to come. It allowed them to build relationships that required them to work together to come up with solutions to common problems. If they maintain these relationships, the girls will likely be able to continue supporting each other to overcome challenges many of them face, such as resisting the sexual advances of older men. This could result in a delayed age for pregnancies, an ability to stay in school longer, a more highly educated female population, and ultimately could boost Tanzania’s economy as women are able to obtain higher paying jobs.

While on the island, we were able to visit several politicians and government workers. Each welcomed us and strongly encouraged us to come back and bring more students. We are hopeful that partnerships between this community and the University of Georgia will be further bridged in the future.

Implications for Future Programs and Research

Theatre of the Oppressed is a practical tool that could be used by other practitioners where language and cultural barriers exist. Not only is it usable, but it is also a method that can be easily taught to community members that they can continue to use on their own. It does not cost money so it may be used in communities with little monetary resources. Many of the tools and techniques can be used by laypersons with only a little practice. Books by Augusto Boal, who first created this method, are readily available at any university library.

For social workers or other helping professions, Theatre of the Oppressed is a tool one could take into any setting. Besides being useful internationally, it can be used in community development work, family counseling, schools, and could be adapted to use with individuals. The point is that it empowers clients to think about the challenges they are facing, envision their desired solution, and figure out how to make that solution happen. Additionally, Theatre of the Oppressed aligns with social work values, as the facilitator recognizes that the clients or community members are experts on their own lives and are often seeking to overcome injustice.

Limitations

Although this partnership initially had much support from University administration as well as from this Tanzanian community, with the economic crisis in the United States it has been hard to maintain the same level of commitment. While the University would likely otherwise have stayed committed, the budget and lack of affordability of travel to and from Tanzania on the part of students has been a hindrance. We have continued to remain involved with this community (both authors returned in 2010 for a longer period of time and one again in 2012 for a nearly six-month stint) are hopeful that the University as a whole will be able to renew its commitment to this community in the future.

There are, of course, additional limitations (such as language and cultural barriers, limited time in the community, etc.) but university buy-in seems to be the most pertinent. Communities where universities are engaged need to know that the universities will do what they say they will do. University follow-through breeds a deeper level of trust on both ends and is helpful rather than harmful in the communities long-term. Donaldson and Daughtery (2011) would go so far as to say that the university’s responsibility to the community after the service-learning project is over is one that needs to be addressed as an ethical issue. What is the extent of the relationship? Will it be a single project or an ongoing partnership? These are things that need to be discussed and agreed upon in the planning stages.

One additional limitation that needs to be addressed is the short amount of time we were
able to spend in the community. Despite the advantage we had since Hagues already knew many of the women and girls and was familiar with the community, a deeper level of understanding could have been obtained if we could have been there for a longer period of time.

Conclusion

Programs such as this one that empower girls to value themselves and discover solutions to challenges is one way to begin bringing about gender equality at the community level. The work of justice, we are reminded, includes an educational component as part of the empowerment process where the community partners are treated as equal partners in determining the need and the solution (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). In this case, both the partners and the graduate students were empowered through this service-learning experience the girl participants recognized cases of injustice they experience and were able to define their solutions, while the graduate students were empowered to lead. This program demonstrates the possibility for development when partnerships are embraced through creative dialogue. As well, when students are given opportunities to lead such programs, they gain a greater grasp of the needs of impoverished communities on an international scale, and become more equipped to address those needs as they become the leaders of the next generation.

References


About the Authors

Rachel Hagues received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science from the University of Georgia. Hunter Parker earned her M.F.A. in Dramatic Media from the University of Georgia and is currently the director of education for training at the School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community in Richmond, Va.

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Community Engagement in Social Work

Jessica Herald, L. Faye Perkins, and Hannah Powers

As first year Master of Social Work students, we were introduced to community engagement through our Communities and Organizations practice course. Our class participated in the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project (MSPP), housed at Northern Kentucky University. We focused on a local community, and ultimately awarded $4,000 to nonprofit agencies serving that community.

The MSPP seeks to educate students about service and nonprofit organizations in the community through hands-on service-learning, with the goals of fostering a student commitment to community service that persists beyond graduation, and developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the community. The MSPP is funded by a grant from the Manuel D. and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation and other community donors. Faculty members apply for MSPP funding through the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement at NKU. The application process is designed to mentor and support faculty and students, and involves syllabus and course content review and planned meetings with community agency representatives and other engaged faculty. Each class selected to participate is given a sum of money to award as a grant to a community nonprofit agency that the class deems most deserving of the award. Under the guidance of the class instructor, students visit nonprofit organizations of their choosing and meet with agency staff to learn about the various programs. Students are involved in requesting and evaluating grant proposals from these agencies to assess which agency will make the best use of the grant funds. Following critical analysis of the proposals and debate among the class, the students determine to which agency the grant will be awarded. Each section of our class was given $2,000 to award to the organizations we felt would best meet the community needs.

In order to research and select appropriate community nonprofit agencies, we needed to understand the needs of our chosen community, Census Tract 505, the westside neighborhood of Newport, Kentucky. The first step in this process was a walking tour of the region, organized by students and guided by the leader of the neighborhood coalition. This walking tour enabled us to gain a greater appreciation of the area’s physical characteristics, community needs, and residents. The community is home to approximately 6,000 residents within an area of less than 3 square miles. Despite a rich history of industry and a wealth of architecturally beautiful buildings, this neighborhood struggles with generational poverty, drug abuse, and crime. Over 15% of the housing units are vacant, and of that number, almost half are abandoned (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Children living within the area attend a school district with the highest rate of poverty in Northern Kentucky and a graduation rate below the statewide average (Kentucky Department of Education, 2013). Despite these weaknesses, we discovered that one of the major strengths of this community is a wealth of nonprofit agencies that serve its residents.

The process of awarding the funds involved many steps, guided by assignments provided by our instructor. Students were organized into...
teams, each of which selected three nonprofits on which to focus our research. We personally visited these organizations and interviewed the staff regarding the agency history, mission, structure, budget, and nature of services. For many, these agency visits were the highlight of the course, as we were able to witness firsthand the passion these agency staff have for the individuals and community they serve.

Our teams then issued requests for proposals to each of the agencies we visited. Teams used a standard rating tool provided by our instructor to review the proposals, and narrowed the candidates to one agency per team. At that point, representatives from each agency were invited to present their grant proposal to our class section. Each team was able to advocate for their chosen agency, which resulted in lively debate among our classmates. In addition to advocating for an agency based on the organization’s missions and goals, students discussed the sustainability of the proposed projects, the number of individuals served and the ways in which they would be served by the projects, and the current funding structure and budget of the agencies. Finally, each section selected the community agencies we determined most worthy of the grant funding.

In total, between the two classes, $3,000 was awarded to the Henry Hosea House. Founded in 1991, the Hosea House is located in the heart of Census Tract 505 and has been the only soup kitchen in Northern Kentucky to serve an evening meal seven days a week, 365 days a year. Each night they serve approximately 175 hot meals to individuals and families of all ages and backgrounds. The money awarded to the Hosea House contributed to the creation of a garden in an effort to lessen the problem of nutritional poverty in the community. Due to a combination of factors, Census Tract 505 is considered a food desert. Lack of financial resources, transportation, and fresh food retailers in close proximity prohibits many residents from accessing a nutritionally balanced diet.

With the help of the MSPP, Henry Hosea House has treated the soil of the garden and has planted a variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as a “living fence” of greenery to surround the garden. Two tons of fresh produce were cultivated and distributed to Hosea House patrons in the first year. According to Hosea House Executive Director Karen Yates, “The plants include blueberry bushes that were planted where our guests sit and wait to come in. They loved being able to sit there and eat right off the bush as they waited.” One client was surprised to learn he liked blueberries, as he had never been exposed to them before they were grown at Hosea House. This year, they expect to double the harvest of the previous year, as they reserved some of the Mayerson funds for additional plants this summer.

The remaining $1,000 grant was awarded to Brighton Recovery Center for Women (BRCW), located in Florence, Kentucky. BRCW is a 100-bed residential substance abuse recovery facility serving adult females who experience substance abuse, poverty, and homelessness. While it is not physically located within Census Tract 505, it serves the community directly; many of BRCW’s clients are residents of Newport, Kentucky. BRCW utilizes a peer-driven model for recovery that seeks to help women maintain sobriety and to reintegrate clients successfully as productive members of their communities. The $1,000 grant awarded to BRCW was used to fund medical services and prescriptions for clients. With the grant funds, numerous residents will be able to access individual mental health counseling services, dental services, prescription medications, and other necessary medical services.

Participation in the MSPP greatly enhanced our learning experience in several meaningful ways. We had the opportunity to engage in charitable giving and were inspired by the investment made in our community through student philanthropy. We were exposed to nonprofit structure and operations, and we participated in the solicitation and review of grant proposals. We expanded our knowledge of nonprofit agencies and their services within our community and were able to advocate among our peers for agencies whose missions are important to us. Many of us maintain a connection to these agencies and have volunteered our time or made monetary donations as a result of this project. This hands-on approach to learning has provided us with an experience we will remember long after our graduate studies are complete.

References


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About the Authors
The authors are students in the Master of Social Work program at Northern Kentucky University. Faye Perkins received her B.A. in psychology from the University of Kentucky. Hannah Powers received her B.A. in psychology from Northern Kentucky University. Jessica Herald received her B.A. in psychology from Miami University.
Art to Life: The Preservation of Personhood

Emily Broman

A sawmiller, veteran, and father from Pickens County, Alabama, Lester Potts was a practical man grounded in his faith and love for his family. But the handiness and helpfulness that had been the hallmark of his persona began to diminish with the onset of Alzheimer’s disease at age 70. In the midst of his cognitive impairment and physical debilitation, Lester was losing elements of personal autonomy and sense of self. Because of his condition it was suggested to his family that he visit Caring Days, an adult daycare center specializing in artistic therapies. Lester was reluctant to do so and was only acquiesced into a visit under the impression he would be performing manual labor. And then, Lester Potts began to paint.

As someone who had never before held a paintbrush, his creativity blossomed, and the disinhibition of his cognitive impairment unleashed a previously untapped artistic ability. Memories lost in conventional communication manifested through depictions embedded in Lester’s artwork, idiosyncratically familiar objects representing themes within his own life story. His work has since been displayed in galleries across the United States, including the David W. Streets Gallery in Beverly Hills. But more importantly, the artistic process provided a mechanism through which Lester could again participate in the core components of the human experience: learning and engaging in dignifying activity and self expression.

Inspired by his father’s transformative experience, Dr. Daniel Potts founded the nonprofit organization Cognitive Dynamics, which focuses on bringing artistic therapies to those with dementia and cognitive impairment. In search of a vector through which a volunteer program could be established, Cognitive Dynamics partnered with the University of Alabama Honors College. Pillars of the Honors College include civic engagement and innovative scholarship, and thus the idea for a service learning course came to fruition as Art to Life, pairing Honors College students with dementia patients who learn to tell their story through original artwork. In order to prepare for their volunteer experience, students enroll in a semester-long three credit hour seminar. Lectures in this seminar range from symptoms and underlying mechanisms of dementia to theories of art therapy and principles of effective caregiving. Relevant readings and writing assignments provide benchmark opportunities for reference and reflection. One of the primary preparation experiences is the Virtual Dementia Tour®, during which we undergo a dementia simulation to grasp the physical impairments of the adult participants. Appropriately frightening, the simulation is critical to encourage sensitive interactions in order to understand a dementia patient’s sensory experience. After five weeks of training, weekly lectures are supplemented with an eight-week art therapy experience, during which we are paired with an adult participant in the community for weekly sessions facilitated by a licensed art therapist employed through the Honors College. Maintaining participant dignity is of the utmost importance; to this end, age-appropriate art materials such as oil pastels, watercolor paints, and clay are utilized as opposed to colored pencils and crayons.

The culmination of our course is a final project in the form of a synthesized life story. Created as a DVD or a story book, the life story project compiles shared memories that surfaced through art therapy as well as family input and personal memorabilia. During the art therapy portion of the semester, lectures focus on life story extraction, authorization, and production. Ultimately, we present our projects to our adult participants and their families in a celebratory dinner at the end of the semester.

Adult participants are identified in partnership with Dr. Potts, as the neurologist from whose patient pool our adults are recruited. As the course director, Dr. Potts also conducts a majority of the lectures and guides course content, while other partners speak to artistic therapies, elements of life story creation, and practices for effective caregiving. Additional partners from the Telecommunications and Film Department – associate professor Dr. Rachel Raimist and a team of student interns – have taught the basics of
documentary film making and relevant technology to design projects of the highest quality. In fall 2012, these film students worked in conjunction with Art to Life to produce a documentary and promotional materials. To handle student recruitment, course logistics, and scheduling, I serve as the course facilitator on behalf of the Honors College; I inherited this role as a previous student, profoundly inspired by my experience.

As a pre-med freshman, I gravitated toward this course in hopes of gaining invaluable patient interactions and an enhanced understanding of Alzheimer’s disease. But full engagement in Art to Life required my elevated and truly personal investment in my participant’s life story; I exercised vulnerability to a new degree in learning to speak with utmost sensitivity and immerse myself into the world of a dementia patient’s wishful perceptions and cruel realities. Such experiential learning unequivocally promoted empathy, distanced from the self-promoting learning in a typical classroom and yet uniquely preparing me for a future in healthcare. Truthfully, though our goal remains to validate our adult participants, as a student I felt validated knowing my involvement held transitive value: bending the trajectory of a life toward the dignity of human experience and honoring an individual’s present identity.

Because of the multi-faceted nature of the course, Art to Life attracts students of all disciplines. Aside from the student partners from the Telecommunications and Film Department, my classmates’ areas of interest range from medicine and nursing to dance and art history. Ultimately, every student background is valued as each experience functions as a ground upon which they can relate to another individual. As the course director and course facilitator, Dr. Potts and I conduct interviews with prospective students, such that all participating students understand the wholehearted commitment and mature interpersonal skills required to participate.

The course embodies engaged scholarship in that students learn to exercise communication skills and utilize scientific and artistic preparations to fully actualize service potential. Additionally, we are solidifying a research component so that students might reciprocally augment their outreach experience by better understanding the cognitive and behavioral effects of art therapy and the life story preservation uniquely characteristic of Art to Life. Presently, the research employs a pre- and post-quantitative survey assessment from the vantage point of the caregivers, concerning four relevant parameters of interest: care partner emotions, care partner behaviors, care partner affect, and caregiver responsibility. In identifying the true efficacy of Art to Life, optimizing course components or improving elements of the experience will facilitate a continually dignifying and enriching experience for all involved.

Of course, not all participants will undergo the transformation characteristic of Lester’s story, and until valid outcomes can be ascertained, we measure the success of Art to Life on the grounds that participant feedback is marked by a renewed sense of self and enjoyment in connecting with students. And while our adult participants regain some autonomy and livelihood in the process of art therapy, I feel the students remain the ultimate beneficiaries. In our crucially formative undergraduate experience, we practice the art of listening to life stories, assimilating into a new community, and connecting in intergenerational relationships. Ultimately, it is through the investment in promoting awareness and effective caregiving tools to younger generations that Art to Life can continue to advocate for those with Alzheimer’s disease.

About the Author

Emily Broman was a University Fellow majoring in Chemical Engineering and Psychology on the premedical track at The University of Alabama when she submitted this article. She is now a student in the Boston University School of Medicine.
Advancing Intercultural Understanding and Personal Development Outcomes Through Service-Learning: Insights from an International Student

Neivin M. Shalabi

Knowledge, experience, and reflection are mutually dependent and interconnected. The things people do comprise their experiences which then become the source of their knowledge. Unless people reflect on their experiences, they are less likely to learn from them (McCarthy, 2003). With this in mind, this essay is a critical reflection account of my experience in a service-learning course I took as a graduate student in a U.S. research-based university. The essay is organized into four main sections. The first provides an operational definition of service learning and briefly discusses past research pertaining to the effects of this pedagogy on student service-learners. The second describes my experience, introducing the goal, nature, and structure of the service-learning course. The third highlights my engagement in the service-learning experience, providing examples of the course activities. The final section of the essay discusses the significance of this service-learning experience, elaborating on some academic, social, and personal gains.

Service-Learning: Definition and Impact

There exist many definitions for service-learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 2003; Jacoby, 1996); each definition emphasizes a specific orientation or aspect of this pedagogy (Bringle, 2013). In this essay, service-learning is defined as course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112).

Research documents a wide range of academic, social, and personal gains of service-learning for the student service-learner. On the academic side, there is evidence that service-learning has positive impacts on students’ learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Strage, 2000; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000) and it is positively associated with increased ability to apply course concepts to new situations (Eyler & Giles). At the social level, Astin and Sax (1998) reported that participation in service-learning positively affects students’ civic responsibility: increased commitment to serve the community, interest in influencing the political structure, and helping others in difficulty. With respect to students’ personal development, studies suggest positive impacts of service-learning on students’ sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development (Astin & Sax; Eyler & Giles; Vogelgesang & Astin). The following sections describe the service-learning course and my engagement in this experience.

Service-Learning Course

The service-learning experience under examination in this essay was part of my graduate studies. In particular, I took this course to fulfill a part of the requirements of my cognate that focused on not-for-profit organizations management. The overarching goal of the course was to enable students to acquire practical knowledge and experience on successful management of not-for-profit organizations. To that end, the course addressed several management issues as they relate to not-for-profit organizations, including organizational vision and mission, strategic planning, goal setting, program evaluation, leadership, and the co-ordination of staff and volunteers.

In the beginning of the course, the instructor presented the class with study proposals from not-for-profits addressing several causes, asking that students form groups based on their selected organizations. Given my interest in youth issues and prior volunteer experience with disadvantaged members of this age group in Egypt, I chose a
youth-based organization. Two other classmates chose the same organization, and thus we formed a group. Structured reflection was integrated in the course; the instructor encouraged student teams to reflect on their service-learning experiences at the end of class sessions. Additionally, each student developed an individual reflection paper to fulfill part of the course assignments. The service component of the course was designed to allow students to apply the knowledge gained in the course in addressing the issues facing and/or enhancing the opportunities presented to a not-for-profit organization in the local community. Specifically, groups of students were charged with providing consultancy services in the form of written and oral reports to the management of their respective organizations. Each report included a summary of the study process, an explanation of the major findings, and a list of the recommendations and their rationale. The following section briefly describes the selected organization.

Overview of the Organization

The youth-based not-for-profit was a small organization whose mission was to provide experiential and outdoor learning opportunities that encourage personal empowerment, leadership, and community participation so that clients reach their potential at home, in school, and within their community. The organization’s activities were targeted to middle- and high-school students from low-income and racial minority backgrounds. To break the economic barrier to students’ participation, the organization offered its services with no fees. Examples of the organization’s activities, included swimming, rock climbing, and hiking training sessions in addition to assistance with homework. Besides these activities, the organization arranged a weekend wilderness adventure once a month.

Engagement with the Service-Learning Course

After a series of discussions with the organization’s director, my team decided to conduct an evaluation that could be used for developing a letter of analysis and recommendations. Examples of our work included conducting field trips; interviewing the executive director; developing a survey questionnaire to assess clients’ perception of the organization; examining and analyzing documents pertaining to the not-for-profit, such as its mission, bylaws, board members’ rights and responsibilities; and reviewing the organization’s website.

Using the collected data, we conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWAT) analysis. The outcomes of our research and analysis indicated that the major challenge was how to strike a balance between expanding the organization financially and programmatically while enhancing its visibility in the neighboring community. Accordingly, my team focused its work on three major areas: marketing, volunteer recruitment, and board of directors. By the end of the course, we submitted a report including recommendations pertaining to these areas and rationales for each suggestion to the not-for-profit management. Additionally, we presented our work in class.

Critical Reflections on the Value of the Service-Learning Experience

This service-learning course was distinct. Before discussing my gains from this experience, I would like to stress that this course was more engaging and enjoyable to me than courses that focus solely on theory within the walls of the classroom. The practical nature of this educational experience was instrumental in making it exciting. I especially enjoyed the field trips my team made to the not-for-profit. Additionally, this experience was significant to me in other ways. First, while the course materials increased my knowledge base of the third sector (not-for-profit organizations), the study process and the development of the team report enabled me to gain practical experience in addressing issues pertaining to the management of not-for-profit organizations. Equally important, the structured reflection activities throughout the course afforded me valuable opportunities to reflect on the whole experience and draw lessons that have informed my attitudes and practices since then.

Second, I very much appreciated the opportunity to apply already learned materials in completing the assignments of this course and enriching my teamwork experience. For example, I utilized my research skills in designing the survey used to gauge clients’ perception of the not-for-profit. Also, I used my specialized academic knowledge on diversity to offer recommendations for diversifying the organization’s Board of Directors, thus attracting
members who reflect the demographics of its clients. These gains support research indicating that service-learning enhances students’ ability to apply what they have learned in the real world (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Moreover, this experience consolidated my previously gained knowledge about the value of experiential learning and reflection, thus strengthening my commitment to incorporating active learning and reflection activities into my teaching practices to enhance student learning and build their characters.

Third, this experience led me to change some of my preconceived notions about life conditions in the United States. Given the U.S. common image in Egyptian media as a prosperous country, I, as an outsider based on my status as international student in the U.S., was under the impression that everyone in the U.S. leads an easy life and enjoys prosperity. But, this experience opened my eyes that despite the overall prosperous nature of the U.S., poverty still exists in the nation. Specifically, I was surprised upon seeing the not-for-profit facility, which was housed in a basement of a small building. The facility was disorganized, dusty, gloomy, underequipped, and understaffed. Although I saw several grassroots organizations in Egypt, it was difficult for me to believe that such a modest space existed in the United States. The physical appearance of the facility was so striking to me that I kept recalling the sharp contrast between the reality of what I saw at the organization and the typical pictures portrayed in Egyptian media about the prevailing conditions in the U.S.

**Experience Changed Perceptions**

Beyond the perplexity I felt upon seeing the physical appearance facility, I came to realize that not everyone in the United States, as I used to think, enjoys “the good life” life. Rather, there exist disadvantaged populations who struggle in their daily life in a country commonly known as the land of opportunity. Specifically, I came to see how minority youth suffer from lack of quality educational services, among other issues, similar to their Egyptian counterparts. Furthermore, my direct contacts with the organization’s multiple constituents allowed me an invaluable opportunity to realize how people, irrespective of their demographic characteristics and geographic locations, have many things in common. For example, during reading youth completed survey forms, I was struck by the similarity between these young people’s thoughts and those of the disadvantaged youths with whom I interacted in Egypt before starting my graduate studies in the U.S. My newfound understanding of the realities of life in the U.S. consolidates previous findings that service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cross-cultural understanding (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Berry, 1990; Boyle-Baise, 1998).

I felt privileged to have gone through this and other genuine experiences that enriched my intercultural experiences. Unfortunately, however, such opportunities are not afforded to all international scholars. As such, I offer this experience to higher education professionals, urging them to maximize service-learning opportunities for students, both domestic and international. These activities, though, should be well-designed such that they incorporate sufficient preparation; reflection; and intervention plans during the experience and adequate debriefing after the experience (Bringle, 2011; Lou & Bosley, 2008; Vande Berg, 2007). Through such thoughtful opportunities, students are more likely to challenge their preconceptions, form more complete and realistic picture about others from different backgrounds, and develop feelings of empathy for people with different values and lifestyles. Significantly, such service-learning projects could enable students to help make a positive difference in the global community while honing their multicultural competencies through interacting directly and adequately with diverse community members.

**International Students’ Importance in Promoting Intercultural Understanding**

While offering these opportunities to college students in general is a good practice, attracting international students to such activities is especially crucial. Given the privilege and uniqueness of this body of students in several aspects, including possessing multilingual skills and the likelihood for them to hold positions in international arenas, international students are better situated than their domestic peers to promote intercultural understanding between their native and host cultures. They could serve in formal and/or informal capacities as ambassadors who spread the values of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence and stress how people, regardless of their cultural background, relate to each other as members in the global community.

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Therefore, concerted attention should be paid to engage international students in well-designed service-learning projects. These efforts are especially important given Deardorff and Edwards’ (2013) claim that “the human race must confront in the twenty-first century” (p. 178).

Contribution to Personal Development

In addition to promoting my intercultural understanding, this service-learning course contributed to my personal development in several ways. Specifically, it provided me with practical opportunities to exercise my leadership and professional communication skills while playing the role of a consultant, strengthening previous research findings that demonstrate positive effects for service-learning on leadership and communication skills development (Astin & Sax, 1998; Dugan, 2006; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Also, this experience was instrumental in shaping my identity as a team player and enhancing my collaboration skills. In particular, it afforded me a valuable opportunity to practice the process of coordinating the schedules of and handling conflicts among team members. Furthermore, my work with two classmates enabled me to learn strategies for successful collaborations among diverse team members. For example, I recognized the value of discussing the goals of the group and the responsibilities of each member for achieving these goals at the initial phase of collaboration. Also, I realized the importance of agreeing on the channels of communication among group members, and between the group and external stakeholders in ensuring timely and effective communication among all involved parties. Additionally, I appreciated the value of distributing responsibilities among group members based on the unique skills and talents each member possesses in order to benefit from their diverse resources for achieving the team’s goals and maximizing its success. Moreover, I better understood the importance of providing constructive and timely feedback for team members and showing appreciation for them in establishing good working relationships, generating a positive atmosphere, and energizing team members to exert more effort while enjoying the work. This experience really helped me grow as a collaborator and enabled me to better understand the opportunities and challenges presented by collaborative work. Given my academic, social, and personal gains from this course, I strongly advise college students to engage in service-learning opportunities as an effort to get the optimal benefit from their collegiate experience.

Conclusion

The intent of this essay was to reflect on my service-learning experience as a graduate student. The first section revealed that service-learning is a type of experiential education that aims to connect classroom instruction with its application in the real world. It also showed that reflection is a key component of this pedagogy. The second section described the service-learning course under examination. This part showed that the service-learning course aimed to familiarize students with management issues facing not-for-profits and prepare them to successfully lead such organizations. It also explained that the course was designed for students to work in teams to provide consultancy services to management and reflect on their overall experience through structured opportunities for reflection throughout the course. The third section outlined the service activities associated with this experience, providing examples of the research and analysis activities my team conducted. This part indicated that my team focused primarily on exploring strategies for enhancing the organization’s visibility in the community, attract more volunteers, and increase the effectiveness of its Board of Directors. The final section discussed the personal impact of the course on me. This section presented examples of my academic, social, and personal gains from this experience. For example, it deepened my understanding of the not-for-profit world and affected my sense of efficacy in that I had an increased sense that I could address issues facing not-for-profits and make a concrete effort toward their improvement. This effect is especially important given Bandura’s (1995) remark that beliefs about one’s efficacy are crucial to social change. Also, it showed how this experience informed my teaching philosophy such that it reinforced my plans to integrate experiential learning into my teaching practice and offer opportunities for students to reflect on their learning experiences, and practice outdoor activities. Additionally, this experience afforded me valuable opportunities to exercise and advance my leadership, communication, and collaboration skills.

Significantly, how this service-learning
influenced me is consistent with past research exploring the impacts of service-learning on student participants. For example, similar to my experience, prior research suggested positive impacts of service-learning on self-efficacy (Stewart, 2009), developing students’ interpersonal development, communication, and leadership skills (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Keen & Keen, 1998). Since my reflections reinforce outcomes of past research on the positive effects of service-learning on students, it is my hope that these reflections add evidence for the value of service-learning to college students, thereby encouraging faculty members to integrate it into their mainstream teaching practice and urging institutions of higher education to reconsider faculty reward structures such that they recognize the faculty who engage students in addressing authentic community issues while advancing their learning in the classroom.

References


**About the Author**

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JCES invites submission of book reviews that speak to a wide range of issues relevant to the scholarship of engagement. Reviews of books within the social sciences, natural sciences and math, medicine and health, the environment, law, business, philosophy, religion, communication, and the arts and humanities are encouraged. Although reviews of individual books are the most common, JCES also invites submission of several reviews that speak to a common topic area, to be published as a group. All book reviews submitted to JCES should provide readers with a broad overview of the book, but should go beyond this description to discuss central issues raised, strengths and limitations of the text, and current issues of theory and practice raised by the book that are germane to the subject matter and engaged scholarship.

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Heather Pleasants, Ph.D.
Book Review Editor
As the ninth volume of the Advances in Service-Learning Research series, an initiative that began in 2002, Creating Our Identities in Service-Learning and Community Engagement addresses an area of research that has not been widely discussed: the topic of identity in relation to service-learning and community engagement. Each of the authors of this edited volume touches upon different aspects of identity theory, described as “an organizing concept around which the individual is able to integrate varied aspects of the self and aim for consistency in behavior” (p. x). This volume appeals to a wide readership, including university faculty and staff, community partners, students, or any other service-learning stakeholder that is interested in the topic of creating and sustaining identity through service-learning and civic engagement partnerships.

The book is organized into four parts. The three chapters in Part I examine the role of service-learning in higher education institutional identity through the examination of promotion and tenure guidelines, institutional websites, and critical reflection mechanisms developed by faculty. Chapter 1 analyzes survey responses to the 2006 applications for the Elective Classification for Community Engagement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The authors found that most of these institutions place community engagement in the category of service in the evaluation of promotion and tenure. In Chapter 2, the authors reviewed online websites of 25 “research-extensive” universities to see how engaged scholarship was promoted. Then, the authors developed a matrix of this material to stimulate a national effort to collect, maintain, and share information about programs, activities, and policies to grow the field of practice. Chapter 3 utilizes case study methodology to examine data from a faculty initiative using the DEAL Model of Critical Reflection (Description, Examination, Articulation of the Learning). The conclusion of this case study points to the benefits that faculty gained through collaboration and how their “pedagogy” was transformed. Six themes also emerged: the role of institutional support; the rationale for using reflective writing; the importance of structuring assignments; the necessity of facilitating feedback to students; evidence of effectiveness; and challenges for faculty. The studies in this section suggest that universities are more widely recognizing service-learning initiatives but this approach is not often fully integrated into the system.

The two chapters of Part II explore the topic of partnership identity through the lens of the community partner. In Chapter 4, the research of five cases seeks to address whether faculty-community partnerships are capable of developing organizational identities, guided by the principles of partnership: “a shared understanding of ‘who we are’ as a [partnership] entity” (p. 75). Through the analysis of the organizational attitudes about partnership (the mission, organizational structure, expectations), the author concludes that partnership identity may help those organizations make sense of what it means to be a partner with each other. Chapter 5 discusses the results of a questionnaire sent to campus and community partners, as well as interviews that were conducted about university-community partnerships, in order to show how to create and sustain meaningful relationships between these two entities. The authors discuss the success and pitfalls of partnerships and point to the importance of frequent communication and that the vision, mission, purposes, and expectations of the partnership should be formalized in writing. The authors of both
chapters conclude that a mutual identity can be achieved through service-learning initiatives between university and community partners through open communication and dialogue.

The three chapters of Part III focus on the student perspective through comparative studies of student performance between learners who engaged in service-learning and those who did not. Chapter 6 provides a literature review on this topic and then presents an analysis of the K–12 standards associated with middle and high school programs implemented in a school district in Philadelphia, along with the positive outcomes. The results of the study pointed to how students involved in service-learning had higher test scores and had improved behavior. In Chapter 7, the authors present a two-year investigation of an after-school mentoring project through a middle school-university partnership. The study addresses both the perspective of the mentor and that of the student and compares group mentoring with one-on-one mentoring. The results show that middle school youth improved both emotionally and academically and benefited the most from group mentoring. Mentors felt that they developed teaching skills, knowledge of youth, and community understanding. Chapter 8 addresses “cultural-based service-learning,” defined as “a pedagogical approach that intentionally integrates race- or diversity-related content with community service by providing students with opportunities to learn about social disparities associated with diverse communities” (p. 190). By administering a pretest and posttest to an albeit demographically homogenous group of students, the authors found positive changes over the semester in their problem-solving skills, awareness of racial privilege and blatant racial issues, ethnic identity, and racial attitudes. From the research presented in this section, readers can see that students benefit from community or service-learning projects that take place during and after school.

The four chapters in Part IV provide a synopsis about the past, current, and future research initiatives of service-learning and civic engagement, including the international perspective of scholars from several countries and the differences between research in K–12 and university settings. Chapter 9 examines the interdisciplinary nature of service-learning through library and information science research. The authors examined literature represented in journals such as the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning and the Advances in Service-Learning Research series, as well as masters’ theses and dissertations on service learning published between 2004 and 2006. The results show a wide range of departmental affiliation of service-learning scholars and diversity in the research from which they draw. The authors noted differences between those writing theses and dissertations versus those writing articles. The conclusions of the study point to the importance of cross-collaboration among disciplines as an opportunity for tapping a wider range of sources.

Chapters 10 and 11 are transcriptions of presentations given at service-learning conferences. In Chapter 10, Lori J. Vogelgesang gave a plenary address at an unnamed service-learning conference. Vogelgesang suggests that motivation is a strong reason for faculty commitment to service-learning and offers five tips for researchers to help them address the interconnectedness of service learning and what it means to live in a multicultural world: network, do good work, practice what you preach, publish and disseminate your work. Chapter 11 consists of a transcription of a plenary panel session during the Eighth International Research Conference. The speakers represented the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Australia, and Canada. They were asked to discuss and provide tips about service-learning and community engagement research. All of the panelists were in agreement about the importance of building community and being mindful of the context where this research takes place. An analysis of the individual presentations reveals both commonalities and differences among panelist responses. Chapter 12 summarizes the process by which K–12 standards for service-learning were developed with the end goal of encouraging the development of similar standards in the realm of higher education. The authors reconfirm several important themes from other chapters: the usefulness of interdisciplinary collaboration, the need to foster a shared sense of community through service-learning and community engagement, and developing standards for this type of work. The authors address the ways in which research can better inform practice: “As the field develops, researchers need to develop broader research questions that go beyond program evaluation” (p. 275).

The investigative aspect of service-learning takes precedence in this volume, with the most
amount of material found in Part IV. Part II, on partnership identity, has the fewest chapters. Nonetheless, the authors of this compilation provide excellent literature reviews on service-learning and identity theory by citing both influential scholars in the field (Boyer, 1996) as well as more recent studies about the long-term effects of service learning and identity (Spring, Dietz & Grimm, 2006). Most of the chapters also include information about research limitations. Those most commonly discussed were the small number of institutions or partnerships that were studied, demographic or geographic limitations of the research participants, or a narrow research scope (web-based only or for a brief amount of time).

This volume provides an engaging and inspiring assessment of the interplay between service-learning and identity from all angles, thus paving the way for enriched conversations about the impact of community engagement on self, other, and collective. It can be placed within a larger trajectory, ranging from John Dewey’s seminal works about identity, service, and democracy (1916; 1927) to Saltmarsh and Hartley’s recent compilation To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement and Democracy and the Transformation of Higher Education (2011).

References

About the Reviewer
Kajsa Larson is an assistant professor of Spanish at Northern Kentucky University.
Canadian Scholars’ Book Moves Engagement from “How to” to Socio-Political Aspects

Reviewed by Marc Felizzi


Rather than dryly delineating what community engagement is and should be, editors Lynette Shultz and Tania Kajner add life to this concept in their wide ranging compilation Engaged Scholarship: The Politics of Engagement and Disengagement. The editors attempt to move the discussion of academy involvement in the community from a description of how to engage the citizenry to one of how to comprehend and develop awareness of the socio-political aspects of the community, as well as the importance of service-learning and the scholarship of engagement. Shultz, an associate professor and co-director of the Centre for Global Citizenship Education and Research at the University of Alberta, and Kajner, a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, have extensive experience in the scholarship of engagement, global policy, and international education. Shultz and Kajner have included contributions from writers in the areas of global citizenship, community engagement, educational policy, sociology, anthropology, and human services to produce a compilation of studies and essays that address various perspectives of community engagement, service-learning, educational policy, media studies, deliberative democracy, and more in a lively and incisive book.

They offer articles that review the community engagement movement of the past 20 years. Struggling under a constant push and pull to define the ethereal concepts of community engagement, both editors hold that effective engagement requires a move away from an economy of knowledge (often held within the halls of higher learning) to a citizenship of knowledge, whereby the public contributes heartily to scholarship and academia.

This concept of knowledge as a privilege has been addressed in earlier literature, for example, Whitford and Strom (2013), state that “…engaging with communities is not the way universities have functioned traditionally. More often universities have been physically embedded in the geography of the local communities, but not in the real world lives of their residents. This split, sometimes referred to as the ‘town and gown’ separation, was often a reflection (and cause) of mutual distrust and dislike” p. 73). Shultz and Kajner attempt to address this ideological gulf by providing active examples of not just engaging through pedagogy, but of learning from community members, which in turn enhances praxis and builds relationships between universities and communities.

Several chapters were particularly intriguing and thought provoking. In “Beyond the Binary,” Kajner challenges the assertion that most scholarship is the primary fiefdom of the university. She asserts that scholarship must be viewed in the context of a new paradigm, one that encompasses Boyer’s (1990) “four interlocking functions of the scholar;” discovery, integration of these discoveries in the larger social and intellectual contexts, sharing of discovery, and application of this knowledge to the problems faced by individuals and society. Consistent with the perspectives on engaged scholarship articulated by other (Boyer, 1990; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Peterson, 2009). Kajner elaborates on her concept of a citizenship of knowledge by stating that information gathered and shared experiences in the community is research owned by the academy and the participating citizens and students, not solely the university. Kajner’s concept of community engagement extends beyond a unidirectional focus of outreach to fully embrace the idea that engagement is an exchange of ideas, data, and knowledge, a bi-directional flow of learning, not simply telling the community what is best.

To wit, in order to bridge the academy-
community gap, Su-Ming Khoo asserts in her chapter, “Between Engagement and Citizenship,” that there indeed is a space between the two, and this space is best crossed by integrating a service component into university curriculums by encouraging and expecting students to disseminate what they have learned into the community. This expectation of sharing what is learned builds upon the reflexive component and opens the learning process to enable students to learn from one another and from those to whom they deliver newfound information. Additionally, Khoo contends that such a paradigm allows students and universities in developing countries to promote the use of digital technology in learning and pedagogy and allows universities to work with groups that may be especially interested in engaged scholarship, specifically non-traditional and geographically isolated students.

Co-editor Shultz, in her article “Engaged Scholarship in a Time of the Corporatization of the University and Distrust of the Public Sphere,” addressed the trend of the “commercialization of learning” often promoted by multinational corporate interests. Shultz maintains that research emanating from corporate sponsored departments is often, not surprisingly, driven by the agenda of the funding conglomerate. Such research may be suspect, and Shultz contends that desires by universities to ally with corporatons is troubling and may lead to an over commercialization of knowledge and a colonization of communities. Indeed, if the university is providing resources, data, and knowledge driven by a corporate agenda, how can the community truly benefit or remain independent? Shultz discusses various corporations that have disrupted local communities and environments, in the name of “furthering education.” She asserts that in order to be truly engaged, the scholar must push back and “disrupt the logics of discipline pressing corporatism onto the universities” (p. 43) by engaging in scholarship within a paradigm of “pluralversality,” which enables the university to attend to the options of a true global vision.

Several chapters address civic and community engagement in both sub-Saharan and South Africa. Both Ali Abdi and Catherine Odora Hoppers examine the role of the university in deconstructing colonialist and apartheid-based epistemologies in the African community. The potential to merge the concepts of African thought and ontologies into an educational system that encompasses traditional and emerging beliefs is unlimited. Abdi mentions that despite the best efforts of developed countries, the educational systems foisted upon African nations may have done more damage, and may have caused more civic disengagement than engagement. These essays are strengthened by Makkawi’s (2013) assertion that “In post-apartheid South Africa, many university departments have been intensively involved in community engagement initiatives, devoting their academic knowledge and expertise to various community-focused development and processes of reconciliation and reconstruction in a post-conflict society” (p. 91). This statement is reinforced by Catherine Odora Hoppers’ work, which discusses the creation of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) in order to develop a more community engaged and knowledge based pool of instructors and students in South Africa. Hoppers analyzes the role of SARChI in creating such learners and teachers and discusses what South Africa’s universities must do in order to engage the richness of their village and tribal culture into their curriculums. Rather than relying on new technology to promote the university, Hoppers writes that “the information revolution is not a revolution of technology, machinery or techniques, software or speed, but a revolution in CONCEPTS and thus THE WAY WE THINK” (p. 150).

Linda Herrera and Peter Mayo in “Digital Youth, the Arab Revolution and the Challenge of Education of Work,” provide vivid and intimate portraits of the protagonists of a revolution that toppled several oppressive regimes in the Middle East. The editors included this powerful essay to describe engagement in a larger sense, in this case, a revolution that was largely created and fashioned out of the use of social media and digital technology.

The role of social and electronic media in pedagogy and engagement is addressed in Paul Carr’s essay “The Mediazation of Democracy.” While most universities promote the idea of critical thinking and the development of students who use such skills to analyze society and history, Carr maintains that modern media is actively engaged with democracy and education, and therefore, the media play a role achieving more evolved and ethical forms of self-government in the community. Rather than negatively criticize
social media and downplay its utility, Carr writes that society should embrace it as a vessel to promote democracy and to engage, enlighten, and energize the community at large.

Shultz and Kajner have done an admirable job in presenting the work of a diverse group of scholars and writers who together add a critical piece to the epistemology of pedagogy and community engagement. The articles within this collection bring forth many questions and opportunities for rich and stimulating discourse both in the classroom and community.

References


About the Reviewer
Marc Felizzi is an assistant professor of Social Work at Millersville University of Pennsylvania.
Qualitative Methods for Practice Research is a pocket book guide to social work research methods, one of a series of two dozen pocket guides written by various authors covering a variety of topics on research methods. This particular book is co-authored by Jeffrey Longhofer and Jerry Floersch, both associate professors of social work at the State University of New Jersey, Rutgers, and Janet Hoy, assistant professor of social work at the University of Toledo. In coproducing this 200-page 8.5 x 5.5 easy-to-carry guide, the authors offer beginning and experienced social work practitioners a way to understand the qualitative research process of knowledge-building and meaningful application to the practice context of which they are a part. This collaborative work also offers academic researchers ways to sensitize themselves to the practice contexts and the stakeholders in the various client systems. The authors make a strong case for engaged scholarship in which the researcher-practitioner interaction is interdependent and there is an ongoing dialogue toward knowledge advancement and mutually beneficial ends.

A search for the origins of the idea of engaged scholarship leads to Boyer’s seminal work (1990) calling for a reconsideration of the definition of scholarship in academe. In taking a critical look at the reward system for faculty in higher education primarily through research and publishing, he laments the isolated nature of this academic endeavor. As he described in later years, (Boyer, 1996): “The scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge what anthropologist Clifford Geetz describes as the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us” (p. 20). What began as a serious recommendation for scholarship within universities to be connected to the realities of the world outside has today culminated in several disciplines working toward strengthening the research-practice interface. The creation of knowledge that can be suitably applied to real world practice settings is increasingly being recognized as an interactive process between the researcher and practitioner through the phases of problem formulation, conceptualization, creating a design for investigation, executing the study, and utilizing the results (Calleson, Jordan & Seifer, 2005; Hughes, Bence, Grisoni, O’Regan, & Wornham, 2011; Kielhofner, 2005; Wilson, 2006).

Longhofer, Floersch, and Hoy, in this innovative piece on qualitative research methods, exemplify this researcher-practitioner partnership and the value of engaged scholarship in social work practice settings. They subscribe to Van de Ven’s (2007) framework for engaged scholarship where knowledge is to be coproduced through collaborative work and challenging, differing perspectives through an interactive evolving process called arbitrage. The authors foresee this form of engaged scholarship as ushering in a new era in social work research, interdependent as opposed to autonomous and parallel. Besides the introductory chapter, which sets the stage for the purpose and focus of the book, there are five chapters. A “Notes” section gives a chapter-wise elaboration of some of the implicit content. The book ends with a glossary of the conceptual terms used as well as a list of references.

The philosophy of critical realism is introduced and discussed in detail in Chapter 1 wherein attention is drawn to what goes on in the open systems in which social workers practice. The authors see critical realism as best suited for engaged scholarship. A distinction is made between empirical, actual, and real domains where the real is beyond what knowledge can explain and fathom and is part of the complex
experience of the practitioner’s discoveries through reflection in practice situations. In the same vein, the contrasts drawn between brute and institutional (contextual) facts, closed and open systems, downward and emergent causation, and the necessary and contingent demonstrate what constitutes critical realism. In enlightening the struggle that exists in connecting theory and practice, deductive and inductive processes, the concept of phenomenological practice gap (PPG) is elaborated. By the authors’ own admission, this chapter makes for challenging reading but does admirably address the limits of variables-based research, especially when critically looking at the process of implementing evidence-based interventions in mental health practice settings. The authors’ interpretation of the critical realist perspective to causation in social work practice situations is worth a read.

The second chapter illustrates the use of qualitative methods in projects involving engaged scholarship beginning with problem formulation, framing aims and questions to data collection and analysis. Interspersed with examples from practice situations as well as day-to-day experiences, the narrative offers clarity in understanding the stages of research including sampling, recruitment of participants, and the role of the Institutional Review Board. The chapter explains the nature of qualitative data including use of audio-visual media, describes three analytic strategies (thematic, grounded theory, and narrative), and also offers a simplified introduction to the data analysis software, ATLAS.ti. By providing screenshot illustrations of sample data and preliminary coding instructions, the authors give readers an opportunity to get started right away. All this is brought together at the end with a case illustration of youth and psychotropic medication retracing the steps from formulation to findings.

Institutional ethnography as a qualitative method was developed by sociologist Dorothy Smith in the third chapter. The focus of this method is on the web of social processes and relationships in a practice context. This method specifically lends itself to the study of the effects of policy or interventions where, in reality, multiple dynamics come into play and multiple networks of individuals are impacted in different ways. The application of this method is illustrated by the effects of policy on the everyday experience of case managers and clients in community mental health settings. Coproduction of knowledge through researcher-practitioner engagement and identification of PPG is also demonstrated through the illustration.

Chapter 4 discusses how an engaged scholarship approach is used to adapt evidence-based interventions. The authors offer examples from literature where such adaptations were made to incorporate the strengths and needs of the context, which they term positive variance. In examining seven of these adaptations, the authors draw their inferences on the iterative adaptive process and the methods used. An illustration of a jail setting is used to especially affirm the need to anticipate the “particularity” of the setting and the “nature of open systems” (p. 137). The inevitability of phenomenological practice gaps is underscored and practitioners are urged to “reject the premise that experts make knowledge and transfer it downward” (p. 137).

In the final chapter, the multiple aspects of engaged scholarship are tied together by what the authors exalt as the single most important concept in social work practice and research namely “reflexivity” (p. 139). These “internal conversations” (p. 140) or reflections in relation to the contexts are discussed in terms of how they are processed. In addition seven components of reflexivity suited to engaged scholarship are detailed.

The authors’ effort in the form of this concise guide to qualitative research is indeed commendable. The presentation of the rationale to pursue knowledge building in mental health practice settings informed by critical realism and engaged partnerships is a novel perspective in bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners. As the authors envision, this does open up the potential for collaborative research and learning. The real world practice illustrations make for ease in understanding the range of possibilities in the qualitative research process. A unique feature is the inclusion of resource links and references within the narrative of the chapters. At the same time, however, qualitative research today has gained its own level of sophistication such that the initial chapters make for challenging reading and comprehension. Although the authors have made an effort to integrate the concepts in their illustrations, these concepts do beg for more clarity and depth of explanation.

Professional social workers, in their role
of intervening with individual, groups, and communities, are not only governed by the profession’s ethics but also by a set of expected competencies. One key competency is practice that is evidence-based and guided by research and in turn informs research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This book and its philosophical orientation supports this expectation. Lastly, the companion site for the Oxford University Press Pocket Guides to Social Work Research Methods offers additional links and resources related to the content of this book (Pocket Guides to Social Work, n.d.). Longhofer and Floersch offer readers a good experience in qualitative research and a worthy read in the understanding of the intricacies of the researcher-practitioner interface.

References


About the Author
Kala Chakradhar is an assistant professor in the Department of Community Leadership and Human Services, College of Education and Human Services, Murray State University.
Lambert’s *Digital Storytelling* emphasizes the use of storytelling as a cultural artifact and tool for personal growth and community support. Communicating thoughts and emotions through stories strengthens the ability to engage individuals, groups, organizations, and communities worldwide. Storytelling creates an environment where language is power. Combining technology and storytelling to create digital storytelling results in a new medium to interrelate with others. *Digital Storytelling* describes the use of technology to tell one’s story. Throughout the book, Lambert challenges the reader to think about the questions “What shapes our stories?” and “How can we tell our stories in today’s technological world?” An additional question to consider when reading the book is “What is the value of digital storytelling?” These questions address Lambert’s central themes and he answers these questions throughout the book by sharing stories told by “common” individuals. Chapters 1 through 4 provide excellent examples of stories that shape one’s life. His examples include stories about obstacles, achievements, people who have made a difference in one’s life, and life changes. Many of his chapters conclude with a personal story followed by the author’s interaction with the storyteller. This subtle but powerful tool engages the reader in the phenomenological experience of the collaboration involved in the process of creating digital stories. These personal stories describe the “soul of community” and how the story can be used to invoke community activism and education (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Chapters 5 through 11 describe the tools used to tell stories using modern technology and address the question regarding how to tell a story through the use of technology. These tools include pictures, storyboards, and audio programs. The value of digital storytelling is depicted throughout the book but chapters 14 and 15 detail specific uses of digital storytelling.

Readers from diverse backgrounds will enjoy Lambert’s easy to read instructional approach. Chapter 5 illustrates this approach by explaining the seven elements needed, as determined by the author. These elements include ownership of insights, ownership of emotions, finding the moment, seeing the story, hearing the story, assembling the story, and sharing the story. These elements would not be considered evidence based, but a reflection of the author’s lived experience of facilitating digital storytelling workshops over the past two decades. This chapter gives the reader an excellent recipe for digital storytelling, including the emotions evoked, the importance of visual, audio and tactile response, and the methods to tell the story. To illustrate the importance of the audience in sharing the story, Lambert describes how the “permanency story” of foster children can be used in social work training. Lambert’s seven elements provide the reader with diverse approaches to digital storytelling, which includes audio, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles. Also included in this chapter is scholarly information about copyright issues when using other authors’ material and providing useful information to academicians as well as lay people.

Lambert’s mastery of storytelling and the rationale for digital storytelling is evident throughout the book. Although his examples are taken from his workshop participants, the reader gains a sense of how useful digital storytelling is in other arenas such as education, community activism, counseling, and healthcare. Chapter 14 is dedicated to the application of digital storytelling in a healthcare setting. In this chapter, he describes a program called Patient Voices, which uses storytelling to advocate change in healthcare, and he incorporates a question and answer session with the founders of the program. They describe the value of digital storytelling in end of life care. This chapter demonstrates how digital storytelling gives terminal patients control to decide what story they want to share and what visual aids will be used to tell the story. Used in this way, this medium can provide closure for the patient and family.
The use of digital storytelling in higher education is discussed in the last chapter of the book. The chapter is authored by academicians from four state universities representing the East and Midwest. The chapter’s authors provide examples of how digital storytelling can be used in the classroom as well as with faculty development. For example, Jacobs describes how digital storytelling strategies used in his course “Digital Storytelling in and with Communities of Color,” required students “to think about the ways that the media had represented them and their communities” (p. 177) and to “speak back to those representations, to make their own representations about themselves and their communities” (p. 177). The chapter engages and challenges readers to brainstorm ideas on the use of digital storytelling in program coursework. Current articles written about digital storytelling emphasize the significance of the tool in education (Czarnecki, 2009; Morgan, 2014), and although the chapter was specific to higher education, digital storytelling can be used in all educational settings (Czarnecki, 2009; Morgan, 2014).

Links between theory and practice are a limitation of the book, especially for those who may wish to delve more deeply into the epistemological and methodological frameworks connected to digital storytelling pedagogy and outcomes. Lambert’s descriptive terminology postulates narrative theoretical perspectives. These concepts include constructing and reconstructing one’s story based on his or her worldview (White & Epston, 1990). Descriptive terms from narrative theory such as co-constructed, reframing, and identity construction to explain the importance of storytelling within the community framework are used within the book. Narrative theory gained prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bruner, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988; White & Epston, 1990) and is a framework that encompasses the use of story as a tool of empowerment (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative theory is built on the idea that people’s lives and relationships to others are shaped by their life stories. The uniqueness of the person is defined by his or her story and the interpretation of their stories. Issues related to self-concept, interpersonal relationships, and personal growth are explored, deconstructed, and reconstructed to develop a new story (White & Epston, 1990). This storytelling approach mimics the book’s design and linking the theory to his chapters would have strengthened the book’s framework.

Another limitation of the book is its ongoing reference to the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS). CDS is a non-profit organization that provides workshops on digital storytelling. Chapter 6 is devoted to the CDS workshop model, and although relevant to the topic, the redundancy to the author’s proprietorship may limit the reader in seeing digital storytelling beyond this particular framework (see Alexander, 2011, and Ohler, 2013, for example, for media and education-oriented perspectives on digital storytelling). If the reader can look beyond the strict adherence to the CDS model of digital storytelling, the book provides readers the tools needed to tell a story enmeshed in emotion, logic, and reflection.

References


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