HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Shaping Lives: The Everyday Hero as Transformative Agent
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Message from the JCES Editors

Dear Engaged Reader,

Welcome to the inaugural special issue of the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*! We are excited to introduce this issue on engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which the JCES leadership team enthusiastically agreed to sponsor based on a proposal submitted by Dr. Kimberly King-Jupiter, who served as the guest editor for this issue. This special issue is a labor of love and the culmination of two and a half years of hard work.

*JCES* would especially like to thank Dr. King-Jupiter for her vision in making this special issue a reality. Dr. Thurman Webb, Dr. Sandra Harris, and Dr. Alethea Hampton also served in editorial roles along the way. We also acknowledge those who reviewed manuscripts and otherwise contributed to completing this issue.

Finally, we would like to introduce Dr. Rhoda Reddix, the associate editor for special issues at *JCES*. Dr. Reddix, who serves as an associate professor in the School of Arts and Sciences and director of service-learning at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University (Baton Rouge, LA), has a long and distinguished history of engagement as a scholar, mentor, and practitioner. She was instrumental in getting this issue “across the finish line.” We look forward to her leadership in forthcoming specials.

We hope that you enjoy this issue and its timely message.

Sincerely,

Marybeth Lima, Editor

Drew Pearl, Associate Editor

Dr. Marybeth Lima is the Cliff and Nancy Spanier Alumni Professor at Louisiana State University

Dr. Andrew Pearl is director of Community Engagement, Research, and Publications in the Center for Community-Based Partnerships at The University of Alabama
Initially, as a precursor to this special issue, I wrote a manuscript that highlighted work that I was doing within my community to extend volleyball to marginalized communities. However, with the onset of the societal changes resulting from the coronavirus and the demands for changes in policing triggered by the public lynching of George Floyd, I felt compelled to rewrite the introduction to this special issue considering the current climate.

For many faculty members, the types of communities that have been historically marginalized in the United States are foreign to them. This circumstance was overtly apparent to me during the early part of my academic career. I remember when the State of Alabama passed a law requiring faculty involved in the training of teachers to demonstrate their ongoing engagement in K–12 schools. The law was designed to keep faculty in touch with the very schools and communities that were destinations for the new teachers they produced. The following was an exchange between me and a colleague:

**Colleague:** Hey, Kim, I need your help on something.  
**Me:** Sure, what's up?  
**Colleague:** With this new law, I need to find a school where I can volunteer. I'm not talking about the schools where you work; I'm talking about other schools that I might feel more comfortable working.  
**Me:** Honestly, Donald, I probably don't work with any schools where you would feel comfortable. I only work with schools that need me.

As I reflect on that exchange now, part of the challenge of higher education is its capacity to serve communities that the faculty “do not know” and oftentimes, “don’t want to know.” This mindset is a reflection of white America. To distance themselves from knowing the realities of black and brown Americans is to remain delusional about the American dream and the reality that that dream is attainable for all of us. It is not.

The onset of the coronavirus unveiled what some of us have always known to be true: that black and brown populations are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty and less likely to have access to healthcare. Because of these characteristics of our society, black and brown populations were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This is not the case because we are somehow less responsible. In fact, the visages of irresponsible behavior amidst this pandemic of people at the beach, attending parties, or going to church and not practicing social distancing cut across racial and class lines. No, diverse and poor populations are more likely to work in service fields deemed essential during the pandemic. These were the very people who risked their lives to continue serving food, stocking the shelves in the grocery stores, and working at the checkout lines, among other roles served. More notably, because healthcare insurance is often not tied to their employment circumstances, most of these workers do not have access to medical services.

Amidst the dystopian reality of the pandemic, Americans learned of three horrific cases of modern-day lynching at the same time, even though they actually occurred months apart. Americans watched a Minneapolis police officer strangle George Floyd, an African American man, for almost nine minutes. Derek Chauvin strangled Floyd leisurely with no fear of interference because three other police officers stood watch so no one intervened. We immediately learned of Mr. Floyd’s murder because there was a video. This example of barbarism was companioned by the news that Breonna Taylor, an EMT in Louisville, Kentucky, was killed while she slept. The pathetic irony is that the person that the police were looking for was already in custody, but Taylor is still dead. While this event occurred in March, the public found out about this case around the time of Floyd’s murder. These events were companioned by the modern-day lynching of Ahmaud Arbery. Unlike the other two cases, Arbery was not murdered by
the police. Instead, two white men ran him down in the street and one of them shot him. The third man is responsible for videotaping the incident and releasing the video almost two months after the fact. However, because one of the culprits was a former police officer, the case was pushed from one prosecutor to another, thereby delaying justice for Arbery’s family. In two of the cases, Floyd and Arbery, the perpetrators have been arrested and the public awaits the trials and hopefully convictions. But the reality is that in most modern-day lynchings involving the police, there is no forthcoming justice.

So, why do I call attention to a colleague’s unwillingness to work in underserved communities amid the current crises? Community-engaged work and the resulting scholarship, if required by universities for faculty tenure, would demand that faculty leverage their expertise to redress some of these structural issues that plague our society. When I consider the work of Dr. Denise Davis Maye, department chair for Social Work at Alabama State University, I’m reminded of the countless ways that she works to connect her program to the community by preparing her students to work with the racially diverse and economically marginalized. I cannot forget the innovative faculty at Tennessee State University, who experiment with diverse ways of growing food in order to eradicate the proliferation of food deserts in our country. I’m also reminded of Drs. Cheryl Seals and Octavia Tripp, both incredible STEM faculty, who extend their expertise in science to populations not widely represented in STEM fields.

While at a predominantly white institution, it is with faculty like Davis-Maye, Seals, Tripp, and others that we formulated community-based initiatives that provided marginalized students with opportunities to grow academically and personally. Programs like Kemet Academy contributed to these students’ ability to successfully navigate high school with many going on to graduate from college. Kemet Academy was funded initially by Dr. David Wilson when he was at Auburn University, now the current president at Morgan State University, and subsequently supported by Dr. Roystick Cook. It demonstrates that with minimal funding there is so much that we can do as faculty to change the circumstances of those least served by this society.

I want to end this editorial with a story about a student who participated in my first community-engaged program while I was a faculty member at a predominantly white institution. During my first or second year, several of us decided to create a mentoring program for students at a local high school. We named the program Project Nia. We were only able to maintain the program for a year or two because we were all non-tenured faculty. So, the program ended.

Years later, I was walking through the hallway during the summer. We were implementing Kemet Academy for the first summer, but the hallway was filled with students matriculating in the fall at this predominantly white school. One of the matriculating students approached me. This was the exchange:

**Student:** You don’t remember me, do you?

**Me:** No. Help me out.

**Student:** Years ago, I was a student in Project Nia. (Slowly the memory of this student from four or five years ago came flooding back.)

**Student:** I was hoping I would run into you. I want to thank you. Before Project Nia, I would have never thought that I would ever attend college. I definitely didn’t think that I would be a student here. It is because of Project Nia and the time that all of you spent with us that I am here. I don’t know where I would be otherwise, but I know I’m here because of you.

**Me:** (Attempting to hold back tears of joy, I weakly replied): You are very welcome.

Once the student finished with the exchange, he bounded off down the hallway to catch up with the other students matriculating in the fall.

When you consider what difference higher education can make, re-situating community-engaged work and the resulting scholarship as a requirement for all of its faculty would resonate. It would send a loud message to marginalized communities about their value. No more symbolic commitments to diversity that have no impact beyond a moment, it would add to the type of systemic change necessary if we are to realize a true democratic society wherein WE are all EQUAL!

**References**

A New Era for Social Change and Community Engagement in Higher Education

From the JCES Associate Editor, Special Issues

Dr. Rhoda Reddix is Associate Professor and Program Director, Office of Service-Learning, at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University

As we mourn the passing of John Robert Lewis (1940–2020), a great servant leader, civil rights activist, advocate of the marginalized, and U.S. representative, across the globe we are living in a time of radical social change as community discourse gives rise to the emergence of a new era.

Rep. Lewis modeled the way by engaging in “Good Trouble” to challenge social injustice in every segment of society and by passing the torch to the next generation of leaders (Hayden, 2020). He applauded the radical, but peaceful demonstrations and advocacy of young adults raising their voices in solidarity against police brutality and systemic racism. His strength and tenacity for seeking social justice and equity for all was unwavering into the eighth decade of his life. We are also in the midst of a paradigm shift in our democracy with the first woman of color as a vice presidential nominee for the Democratic Party, Kamala Harris, a U.S. senator, attorney, and a graduate of Howard University, an HBCU in Washington, D.C.

Higher education has a continued responsibility to prepare the next generation of civically engaged citizens of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who will engage in “Good Trouble” and advocate for the marginalized and challenge institutionalized racism, social injustice, and inequalities that plague our nation. Community engagement in higher education provides a platform that will empower students to gain self-awareness, radical empathy, and compassion, and learn strategies to identify solutions to social injustice issues through critical reflection, advocacy, and action. Moreover, the voice of the community, which was once unheard (Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009), is essential to the mission of higher education through the formation of partnerships working collaboratively to transform society.

Congratulations to Dr. King-Jupiter, professor of education at Alabama State University, and guest editor, for her vision of this inaugural Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship special issue focused on the role of HBCUs as expressed in her column “Community Engagement and Social Transformation: Understanding the Need for Change.” HBCUs are an extension of the communities they serve and have been on the forefront of fighting social injustice and inequality for decades (Patterson, Dunston, & Daniels, 2013). The articles in this special issue are inspiring and highlight the great community engagement work at HBCUs, empowering and transforming the academy and surrounding communities.

I am a graduate of Xavier University of Louisiana, an HBCU. The mission of this university is “to contribute to the promotion of a more just and humane society by preparing its students to assume roles of leadership and service in a global society” (Xavier University of Louisiana Mission Statement, 2020). My collegiate experience at Xavier shaped my personal and professional mission to inspire the next generation of change agents committed to improving the lives of vulnerable populations through transformative community-engaged learning experiences. During the past 21 years, I have been a strong advocate of transformative learning in higher education as a research scientist, community-engaged faculty, scholar, and practitioner. I served in a majority research intensive public university for many years and currently serve as an associate professor and director of service-learning in a small private university. Although the academic environments are different, I witnessed the transforming effects of vibrant, reciprocal campus/community partnerships on the university culture, its constituents, and surrounding communities in both institutions.

This special issue features five articles on transformative community-engaged partnerships at three premier HBCUs.

Their titles and the authors are:

- “International Community Engagement: Transforming Students and Residents,” by Colleen Walters, assistant professor in the College of Nursing at Clayton State University.
• “Shaping Lives: The Everyday Hero as Transformative Agent,” by Cynthia Gadsden, assistant professor of art history at Tennessee State University.

• “Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance: Breaching, Reaching, and Teaching,” by Katari Coleman, director of the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance at Tennessee State University.

• “Building Bridges with Big Brothers Big Sisters: Service-learning Links Between Professional and Civic Engagement Education at a Predominantly Black Institution,” by Susan McFarlane-Alvarez, associate professor in the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Clayton State University and Shandra McDonald, assistant professor in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Clayton State University.

• “Rural Healthcare and Telehealth: The Importance of Social Work Departments at HBCUs in Developing a Competent Workforce in the Rural South,” by Dawna Nelson, assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Alabama State University and Katina Lang-Lindsey, assistant professor in the Department of Social Work Psychology and Counseling at Alabama A&M University.

We recommend that you also read two other articles: “Using Community-Based Participatory Research to Assess the Needs of HIV-Related Services for Infected Individuals in Rural Communities” (E. Brown, C. Brown, Johnson, O., Inman, W., Briggs, R., Burrell, W., Theriot, R., Williams, E., & Heaston, A. (2019). Using community-based participatory research to assess the needs of HIV-related services for infected individuals in rural communities. Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship, 12, 10–16.


References


International Community Engagement: Transforming Students and Residents

Colleen Walters

Abstract

In the 21st century, postsecondary education is increasingly shifting its curricular focus to include community engagement through service-learning and study abroad in response to the need to prepare global citizens. This approach is particularly important in the field of nursing and public health because of the challenges of delivering healthcare to underserved communities and diverse patient populations with complex and chronic conditions. At Clayton State University, an HBCU in Morrow, Georgia, courses across disciplines are infused with community engagement activities. One such course was a service-learning study abroad course for nursing students that took place in Guadalajara, Mexico. A pilot study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach. Results indicated that students experienced moderate to high perspective transformation through critical reflection, and participants at the health fair showed significant knowledge increase on four of the health topics presented by the students. An analysis of the students’ reflective narratives showed themes of language acquisition competency, nursing skill competency to function in a foreign environment, and change in cultural perspective. This pilot study contributes to the body of knowledge on the impact that community engagement can have on a diverse population of students and the international communities served.

Clayton State University (CSU), in Morrow, Georgia, offers courses across disciplines that are infused with community engagement activities through the Partnering Academics with Community Engagement (PACE) program. Faculty are formally trained to facilitate community engagement, community partners are recruited, student learning is enhanced, and residents are expected to be positively impacted locally and internationally (Clayton State University, 2019a).

One such community engagement course was a service-learning study abroad partnership program in Guadalajara, Mexico composed of CSU, the University of Guadalajara, Hospital Civil of Guadalajara, and the Mentoring Engaging and Teaching All Students (METAS) organization for the blind. In May 2016, nursing students from the United States were immersed in Mexican culture and language through homestays, and by taking a Spanish language course at the University of Guadalajara. The community engagement components of the program involved hosting a health fair at Proulex (the University of Guadalajara’s language center), participating in a clinical experience by working alongside nurses at the state hospital, and assisting METAS in the training of students at a school for the blind in Guadalajara. A mixed method pilot study was conducted to determine the impact of portions of this international community engagement course on the student participants and the residents of the host country who attended the health fair. Students’ reflective journals were analyzed and their level of critical reflection, as well as residents’ knowledge on health promotion topics, were examined. The specific research questions guiding the study were: a) What degree of critical reflection and transformative learning do student participants experience on a service-learning study abroad program to Guadalajara, Mexico as a result of the community engagement activities? b) What themes emerge from the student participants’ journal narratives that support whether transformative learning occurred? and c) Does the health promotion knowledge of resident participants of the host country increase because of the health fair?

Background

Community engagement is the “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 Community Engagement Classification, 2018, para. 4). From a public health perspective, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines community engagement as a process of collaboration among stakeholders with the goal...
of building trust and improving communication and the overall health of a community (CTSA Community Engagement Task force, 2011). In successful community engagement projects, students have enhanced learning outcomes and community stakeholders meet specific goals. A key component of community engagement that facilitates student learning is reflection—the practice of critical appraisal of the community engagement experience (Amerson, 2012; Kohlby & Daugherty, 2013; Walters, Charles, & Bingham, 2017).

Twenty-first century college students are expected to master theoretical content in their field of study, as well as to develop practical competencies to solve problems in their communities (The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement National Task Force, 2011). These outcomes of higher education cannot be achieved if academia and the larger community function as silos that are independent of each other’s influence. Starting in the 1980s, universities joined Campus Compact, an organization committed to refocusing the goal of higher education to meet the needs of the public through community engagement and to better prepare college graduates to become global citizens (Campus Compact, 2016). Thirty years later, more than 1,100 colleges and universities have implemented action plans to foster community engagement throughout the curriculum and to track the impact of their efforts (Campus Compact, 2016). Community engagement programs effect communities on different scales, from local to international partnerships.

Community engagement is particularly important in the field of nursing and public health because of the challenges in preparing students to positively impact the health of underserved communities, and diverse patient populations with complex and chronic conditions (CTSA Community Engagement Task Force, 2011). According to the United States Census Bureau (2011), the population is racially and ethnically diverse with a 45 percent increase in both Hispanic and Asian populations. Chronic illnesses—or non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes—are the leading causes of mortality and morbidity worldwide. In 2005, 35 million people worldwide died from chronic diseases (World Health Organization, 2005). In 2016, that number had increased to 41 million (World Health Organization, 2016). The majority of deaths occurred in low- to middle-income countries among vulnerable populations, which are often the destinations of many service-learning study abroad programs.

This was noted in several studies on community engagement with students in health science programs (nursing, occupational therapy, audiology, and physical therapy) participating in service-learning study abroad programs in low-income countries such as Belize, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Zambia, and Cambodia (Amerson, 2010; Krishnan, Richards, & Simpson, 2016; Long, 2016). Students from the United States who participated in international community engagement activities that address chronic disease among the world’s most vulnerable populations return to practice in their own communities with improved learning outcomes that could not otherwise be acquired in the classroom alone (Amerson, 2012).

Common among studies on international community engagement were the concepts of reflection and reciprocity, and the use of reflective journaling (Amerson, 2010; Main, Garrett-Wright, & Kerby, 2013; Pechak & Thompson 2011; Tippen, 2016). Researchers have explored student outcomes impacted by international community engagement activities and found improvements in transcultural self-efficacy, cultural competence, and/or critical reflection (Amerson, 2010; Krishnan et al., 2016; Long, 2016). Amerson (2010) compared the cultural competency between groups of baccalaureate nursing students who participated in service-learning projects, locally and internationally (Guatemala). The students wrote reflective notes, assessed the community, and worked with community leaders to develop and implement health education programs (Amerson, 2010). Results indicated that the international group demonstrated higher levels of cultural competency on all domains of cognitive, practical, and affective (Amerson, 2010).

Cultural competency also improved among undergraduate and graduate students from an audiology program participating in a community engagement program to Zambia (Krishnan et al., 2016). Students worked with schools for the deaf and an intervention clinic in Zambia over a two-week period, and participated in daily debriefing and reflection on the experience (Krishnan et al., 2016). The Public Affairs Scale with subsets of community engagement, cultural competency, and ethical leadership was administered before and after the community engagement activity. The researchers concluded that there was significant
change in community engagement and cultural competency as a result of the community engagement project (Krishnan et al., 2016). Themes emerging from a qualitative analysis of the students’ journal writings were cultural awareness, benefits of hands-on learning, and emotional experiences (Krishnan et al., 2016).

Main and his colleagues (2013) analyzed journals of nursing students who participated in an eight-day program to Belize. Emergent themes included expectations and emotions, reciprocal relationship with the community, acquiring knowledge for future practice, and personal growth (Main et al., 2013). In yet another study, self-reflection journals of 16 nursing students on a two-week community engagement experience in Belize identified themes of culture shock, increased self-awareness, foreign language competency, and a plethora of emotions (Long, 2016). The researcher also used the Cultural Efficacy Self scale to assess change in knowledge and confidence working with the Hispanic population and found significant improvements as a result of the international community engagement experience.

The literature is lacking on international community engagement wherein foreign community outcomes have been explicitly measured. In a descriptive exploratory study, faculty who developed and implemented international service-learning programs were interviewed. Researchers found that faculty were committed to international service-learning because of the positive impact on students and the community but that there was “a tendency to focus on students to a greater degree than the community” (Pechak & Thompson, 2011, p. 233).

This pilot study may be among the first to measure both student and community outcomes to validate the nature of reciprocity that is a defining characteristic of community engagement.

Theoretical Framework and Reflection Questionnaire

This study abroad program as well as the pilot study were based on Mezirow’s (1997) transformative learning theory of adult learning, which was developed in 1978 as a result of research conducted with women in a community college re-entry program. Transformative learning occurs when students, who are given the opportunity to challenge firmly held beliefs, emerge from the learning experiences with new perspectives that are more inclusive, less biased, emancipatory, and more civically engaged (Mezirow, 1997).

Critical reflection, identified as the key concept to facilitate transformative learning, was operationalized and measured using the Reflection Questionnaire (Kember, Leung, Jones, Loke, McKay, Sinclair, Tse, Webb, F. Wong, M. Wong, & Yeung, 2000). The tool consists of a 16-item Likert scale that can be completed in 10 minutes with four items each measuring habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection. All four are types of learning, but only critical reflection leads to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Scores ranged from one to five with one being the lowest and five the highest. The Reflection Questionnaire is moderately reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha score of 0.671 and validity is based on its theoretical underpinning (Kember et al., 2000). Walters et al. (2017) applied a modified version of the questionnaire to a sample of 20 students from various disciplines who participated in short-term study abroad programs to Europe and the Caribbean. Nursing students participating in a two-week service-learning program to Haiti experienced the highest degree of critical reflection and transformative learning compared to students from other disciplines with no community engagement or critical reflection activities (Walters et al., 2017). Study abroad programs across disciplines have the potential to facilitate transformative learning when community engagement and critical reflection occur (Walters et al., 2017).

Program Description and the Partnerships

In 2013, nursing faculty from Clayton State University reached out to Hospital Civil of Guadalajara and the University of Guadalajara to establish a memorandum of understanding and a reciprocal academic relationship. The University of Guadalajara played an integral part in organizing the homestays, language class, and transportation for the program. Nurses at Hospital Civil of Guadalajara received the nursing students with warmth and enthusiasm regardless of language barrier. The first group of students from the United States successfully completed the two-week total immersion program in Spanish language, culture, and the healthcare system in 2014. In addition, faculty and staff from these organizations have participated in conferences in Mexico and in the United States as a result of the collaboration.

The relationship with the community partner METAS began when nursing faculty worked with
the state federation for the blind to solicit Braille machines and canes to donate to the school for blind children in Guadalajara. Several leaders from various state federations of the blind came together in 2016 to create METAS with the goal to further collaborate to mentor and train children who are blind throughout the world, beginning with the school for the blind in Guadalajara (Metas International, 2017). Members of the newly formed METAS organized their activities to include the assistance of the nursing students who participated in the May 2016 program.

In spring 2016, nursing faculty who directed the program completed the PACE workshop to better facilitate community engagement through service and reflection. The workshop consisted of four sessions covering topics such as designing for community engagement, designing and assessing service-learning, defining service-learning, and preparing projects (Clayton State University, 2019b).

The 2016 program associated with this study included the following components: 15 hours of basic Spanish language classes for medical professionals taught by faculty from the University of Guadalajara; 25 hours of hospital clinicals at Hospital Civil de Guadalajara; homestays with Mexican families; hosting a health fair at Proulex; and assisting METAS at a school for the blind in Guadalajara (see Table 1). The following assignments were required: guided reflection journaling and a paper on how the selected health promotion topic addressed the social determinants of health. Students worked in pairs on the same health topic and collected hygiene products to distribute during the health fair. Two pre-trip orientation meetings and one post-trip reunion/debriefing session were held. In addition, continued discourse and daily post conferences occurred while the group was in Mexico. Six weeks after returning to the United States, students were sent the Reflection Questionnaire (optional) to their school email through Qualtrics, an electronic survey program.

Methodology

This is a mixed method pilot study using a convenient sample of students and residents who participated in the international community engagement course in May 2016, with the program director as lead investigator. Approval from the Internal Review Board at Clayton State University was secured in March 2016. The University of Guadalajara Proulex department gave permission to collect data during the health fair. During the first pre-trip meeting, the primary researcher provided written information about the study and collected signed informed consent forms from the 10 student participants. Students were aware that no additional work would be assigned, they could withdraw at any time from the study, and that participation in the study would not affect the grade earned in the course. At the health fair in Guadalajara, resident participants consented by signing the disclosure statement written in basic Spanish on the researcher-developed health promotion knowledge survey.

The two instruments used in this study were a modified version of the Kember’s Reflection Questionnaire (see Table 2) and a researcher-developed health promotion knowledge survey (see Table 3). Kember’s Reflection Questionnaire was delivered via Qualtrics survey system to the students within six weeks after returning to the United States. The students and program director worked together to develop the health promotion knowledge survey to be used at the health fair as a pretest/posttest instrument which consisted of seven questions, one from each health promotion topic presented. Resident participants completed the pretest at the registration table, then passed through each student participant’s presentation before completing the posttest.

Data without identifiers (names, usernames, and email addresses) were extracted at the end of the course from Desire to Learn (CSU’s online course management platform) and Qualtrics survey system. Descriptive analysis was conducted on Reflection Questionnaire responses, and the journal narratives were coded and analyzed using the qualitative analysis software Dedoose. The coding process was systematically developed from the common themes, saturated themes, and distinct perspectives discovered in the student narratives. The transformative theory concepts were also considered in the coding process. Overarching categories that narratives were organized into were disorienting dilemma (feelings of discomfort or distress), transformation (change in perspective), cultural, nursing, and language. Data collected from resident participants were evaluated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software to determine significance of resident participants’ change in knowledge on health promotion topics. The primary researcher kept all data on a password-protected computer and in a locked university office.
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<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
<td>Pre-trip class: Basic Spanish terminology, distribute syllabus, planning and organization, introduction to Guadalajara. Discuss safety issues and conclude pre-trip planning.</td>
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<td><strong>May 7</strong></td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrive in Guadalajara at 9 p.m., meet Mexican families at U. of Guadalajara’s Colegio de Español y Cultura Mexicana (CECM)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 8</strong></td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tour of Historic Center and Tlaquepaque, 9 a.m.–afternoon</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 9</strong></td>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Basic Spanish for Health Care Professional course at CECM, 9 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Salsa class, 3–5 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Basic Spanish for Health Care Professional course at CECM, 9 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Salsa class, 3–5 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 11</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Basic Spanish for Health Care Professional course at CECM, 9 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Health fair at Proulex, 5–9 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Basic Spanish for Health Care Professional course at CECM, 9 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Hospital civil orientation, 3 p.m. (tentative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 13</strong></td>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Basic Spanish for Health Care Professional course at CECM, 9 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Leave for excursion in Guanajuato, stop at Cristo Rey Eye Monument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 14</strong></td>
<td><strong>Saturday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato weekend excursion to include El Pipila and Teatro Juarez</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 15</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sunday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Guadalajara in afternoon, stop at market in Leon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 16</strong></td>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Hospital Clinical, 7 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> School for the Blind Children of Guadalajara orientation (Hotel Del Marques)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 17</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Hospital Clinical, 7 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> School for the Blind Children of Guadalajara, 2–5 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 18</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Hospital Clinical, 7 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Salsa class, 3–5 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 19</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Hospital Clinical, 7 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> School for the Blind Children of Guadalajara, 2–5 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 20</strong></td>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORNING</strong> Hospital Civil, 7 a.m.–noon <strong>AFTERNOON</strong> Final exams, presentations and lunch with Mexican families and staff of CECM, 2–3 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>May 21</strong></td>
<td><strong>Saturday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RETURN TO USA</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
<td>Post-trip discussions, presentations, and assessment of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings**

**Student Participants’ Results**

Of the 10 students who participated in the program, seven completed the Qualtrics survey with the Reflection Questionnaire. Student participant demography showed 85 percent females, 57 percent between the ages 18 to 30 years, and 57 percent self-identified as Black, Asian, Hispanic, or other. This demography is a reflection of the student population at the university in the United States, which is historically minority serving and located in a county with majority minority representation. All student participants were from the undergraduate nursing program and spoke English as their primary language. One participant was already a practicing nurse who was in the online baccalaureate nursing program.

From the Reflection Questionnaire, student participants scored moderately high on the subscales of Understanding, Reflection, and Critical Reflection (see Table 2). Most students somewhat agreed to definitely agreed to utilizing
### Table 2. Reflection Questionnaire Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Habitual Action</strong> (3.14)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During this study abroad program, we did things so many times that I started doing them without thinking about it.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the study abroad experience, when I am working on some activities, I can do them without thinking about what I am doing.</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the handouts received on the study abroad program, I did not have to think too much.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I follow what the instructor says, I do not have to think too much in the study abroad course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Reflection</strong> (4.18)</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study abroad experience has changed some of my firmly held ideas.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this study abroad experience, I have changed the way I look at myself.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this study abroad experience, I have changed my normal way of doing things.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During this study abroad course, I discovered faults in what I had previously believed to be right.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong> (4.50)</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to pass this study abroad course, you need to understand the content.</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study abroad course required us to understand concepts taught by the lecturer.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the study abroad course, I need to understand the material taught by the teacher in order to perform practical tasks.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this study abroad course, you have to continually think about the material you are being taught.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong> (4.25)</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the study abroad course, I sometimes question the way others do something and try to think of a better way.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the study abroad program, I had to think over what I have been doing and consider alternative ways of doing it.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often reflect on my actions to see whether I could have improved on what I did during the study abroad program.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During this study abroad course, I often re-appraise my experience so I can learn from it and improve for my next performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cognitive skills of Understanding, Reflection, and Critical Reflection as a result of the international community engagement experience. The score on the subscale of Critical Reflection was a 4.18 out of a maximum of 5.00 and this showed high likelihood of the student participants experiencing transformative learning as a result of the program.

Students were required to write reflection narratives before, during, and after the program to increase self-awareness and be aware of the perspectives of others. They were asked to summarize and only submit pre and post journal narratives. Guiding questions for the journal responses were:

1. Describe your most challenging or difficult experience today. Why do you think it was challenging? What did you learn from the experience?
2. Describe your most positive or best experience today. Why do you think it was positive? What did you learn from the experience?
3. Describe aspects of your experience today that taught you something about yourself.
4. What did you learn about the Mexican culture, people, and process of healthcare delivery today?
5. Based on your reading of WHO Social Determinants of Health article, how did the reading relate to your experiences in Mexico?
6. As a result of your experiences in this program, explain what you would do differently in providing care or interacting with others from a different culture.
7. How did your experiences today address community health nursing, nursing leadership and nursing education or the nurse educator role?

In the pre-trip reflection narratives, participants indicated that they were nervous and apprehensive about the language and providing healthcare in a foreign country. A student who had never traveled outside the United States stated, “I also [felt] overwhelmed due to it will be my first time flying,” and another student with small children stated that “out of all the stress that [she went] through about this trip, [she was] most worried about my children.” Yet students were excited to embark on the study abroad and eager for challenges ahead. The students wrote, “I [got] excited when attending pre-trip meetings, trying to take in all of the advice and tips” and “I [was] really excited to have this opportunity to go to Mexico and do all the things that [were] planned for us to do. It [was] something new for me, especially to go for service and not vacation.” The point that the student did not feel that the trip would be similar to a vacation was most appropriate and validated the adequacy of the pre-trip preparation.

Post-trip narratives were organized into overarching categories of disorienting dilemma (feelings of discomfort or distress), transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items on Survey</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edad/Age</td>
<td>¿Masculino o femenino/?Male or female?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Nutrition</td>
<td>¿Qué porcentaje de frutas y verduras debe tener su plato?/ What percentage of fruits and vegetables should your plate be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Hand hygiene</td>
<td>¿Por cuántos segundos como mínimo debe lavarse las manos?/ For how many seconds should you wash your hands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 Oral care</td>
<td>¿Con qué frecuencia y duración debe cepillarse los dientes para mantener su salud bucal?/ How often and how long should you brush your teeth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 Diabetes</td>
<td>¿Cuáles son los síntomas de azúcar alta en la sangre?/ What are some symptoms of high blood sugar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Self-breast exam</td>
<td>¿Con que frecuencia deben las mujeres hacerse una autoexploración de las mamas?/ How often should a woman do a self-breast exam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6 Hypertension</td>
<td>¿Qué se puede hacer para prevenir la presión arterial alta (hipertensión)?/ What can be done to prevent high blood pressure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7 Eye care</td>
<td>Mencione algo que puede hacer para proteger sus ojos./ Identify one thing that can be done to protect the eyes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(change in perspective), cultural, nursing, and language. All narratives described moments of disorientation regarding various aspects of the experience. Nine of the 10 post-journals described discomfort with their language competency. Seven participants stated that changes in their perspectives occurred as a result of the program, six referred to their nursing skills, and nine narratives reflected on the culture. So, the three consistent themes or areas in which transformative learning most likely occurred were Spanish language competency, nursing skill competency to function in foreign environment, and cultural perspective.

Language acquisition was the most frequently identified challenge, especially since students were of low Spanish language competency. The disorientation with the language was perhaps enhanced by being totally immersed through home stays with families that did not speak English and working in the hospital without interpreters. However, at the end of the two-week program, several students showed profound change in Spanish language competency and perspective of non-English speakers in America. For example:

… Before the study abroad trip, I would think negatively of a person in the USA who did not speak English. I would think that they spoke a little English and just did not want to, or, that they should have learned to speak English since they were in an English speaking country. Now that the roles were reversed, I felt bad for my previous assumptions. I could empathize with the frustration and challenges that non-English speaking people faced in the USA.

The communication barrier between the patients, and also the [Mexican] nurses and nursing students and I were completely visible . . . I thought it was challenging because it is a situation that I am not in too often. I learned how difficult it is for not only Hispanic patients, but those from all other ethnicities who are in the US who don't speak English, but need medical help. I am hoping that I have time to continue to my skills in Spanish so I don't forget what I have learned . . . here.

The international community engagement activities also facilitated change in student's perception of competency in providing nursing care in a foreign environment; whether at a health fair, hospital, or working with a special needs population such as the blind. The week-long experience at the hospital, working alongside Mexican nurses and nursing students, gave student participants the opportunity to see the nursing profession and healthcare delivery from the Mexican perspective. One participant who was already a registered nurse clearly described this transformation — “My days with [Rosa] gave me a different perspective on my own nursing practice” and “I believe that I am forever changed in a positive way from this experience.” Several students became aware of personal biases against the blind population while working with METAS at the school for blind children. Before the study abroad program, students felt “subliminally prejudiced against blind people” and “bad for the blind” but emerged with new perspective that “blind people can do anything a sighted person can do” and to “ask a blind person” their preference or if they need assistance.

Student change in perspective of Mexican culture and daily life was evident in several narratives. Students were surprised at the close relationships of Mexican family members and public display of respect and affection as stated in these narratives, “I learned that the Mexican culture, people, and healthcare delivery involves family and showing affection” and “one doctor hug and kiss each nurse on the cheek.” One student compared the patient-family dynamic in the United States with that of Mexico during hospitalization. The student noted that “Mexican family units appear to be very strong in the hospital setting [and] witnessed men caring for their mothers and wives. Children and siblings were at the bedsides of family members helping them to eat and ambulate.” Students also wrote of the cultural importance of food and music; “I have a greater appreciation for the food” and “dancing is a significant part of the culture in Mexico.”

The students’ experience of the Mexican culture from a total immersion perspective provided the opportunity to better understand various aspects of the culture and people.

Resident Participants’ Results

Fifty-eight residents completed the pretest portion of the health promotion knowledge survey while only 23 completed the posttest. The low rate of completion of the posttest may be due to a mild earthquake that occurred during the health fair, which caused authorities to suspend all activities.
in the building. The resident participants were Mexican students and instructors at Poulex (a language center of the University of Guadalajara) who were studying or teaching English. Half of the resident participants were males and ages ranged from 15 to 59 years with a mean age of 23 years. The questions on the health promotion knowledge survey assessed knowledge on nutrition, hand hygiene, oral care, diabetes, self-breast exam, hypertension, and eye care respectively (see Table 3). The results of the paired sample t-test showed increased knowledge on all questions except the question on diabetes [Mean PretestQ4 = 0.6957; PosttestQ4 = 0.5625] (see Table 4). Topics with statistically significant increase in knowledge were nutrition, hand hygiene, self-breast exam, and eye care (see Table 5).

Limitations of this study include convenient sampling, small sample size, and lack of power analysis, control of variables, and systematic analysis of the qualitative data. Larger sample sizes of student and resident participants guided by power analysis, from multiple universities, would increase the generalizability of the results to similar populations engaging in international community engagement. Students were not assessed prior to the program for competency in serving Latin American populations or having participated in other community engagement projects, which could be confounding variables affecting Critical Reflection scores. Resident participants were also not assessed for English language proficiency prior to the health fair. Therefore, it would be difficult to associate knowledge change at the health fair on Spanish language competency of student participants. In addition, assessment of knowledge change over time would provide a stronger basis for the impact of the teaching provided by the students.

Discussion and Implication

Critical Reflection and Transformative Learning Experienced by Students

“International service-learning experiences provide opportunities for nursing students to enhance personal and professional development related to global issues, social justice, vulnerable populations, cultural competency, engaged citizenship” and [transformative learning] (Tippen, 2016, p. 94). The degree of critical reflection and transformative learning experienced by student participants was indicated by the moderately high mean score on the critical reflection subscale of the Reflection Questionnaire. According to Kember et al. (2000), the higher the score on critical reflection subscale, the more likely that students experienced transformative learning. Study abroad programs that are designed to promote service and reflection can be the catalyst by which college students develop skills and attitudes needed to become global citizens.

Themes Emerging for Students’ Journals Indicative of Transformative Learning

The themes identified from the analysis of the students’ journal summaries were language competency, nursing skill competency to function in a foreign environment, and change in cultural perspective. These findings were congruent with themes from journal narratives of students from the literature who participated in international community engagement with a reflection component (Amerson, 2012; Curtin, Martins, & Schwartz-Barcott, 2014; Main et al., 2013). Students repeatedly wrote of the “life changing” experience of the international community engagement experience. Their description of challenges (disorienting dilemma) ranged from fears with speaking Spanish, traveling on a plane, and caring for patients in the hospital. Their narratives were rich with examples of overcoming these challenges by developing new ways of thinking through introspection on the experiences, and with Mexican nurses and residents, peers, and course professors. One powerful transformation in perspective can be noted in the way several students perceived persons living in the United States who did not speak English proficiently as a result of being totally immersed in a foreign language. These themes from the journal narratives with such rich narratives support the high score on the Critical Reflection and the probability that students experienced transformative learning.

Change in Health Promotion Knowledge of Residents

To determine the transformation in health promotion knowledge of resident participants, scores from the health promotion knowledge survey indicated an increase in knowledge on six of the seven topics. A statistically significant increase was noted on questions covering nutrition, hand hygiene, self-breast exam, and eye care. These results support the positive impact that students with no or low language proficiency can have on providing preventative health information to a population speaking a different language. Curtin et al. (2014) noted that nursing students participating in service-learning study abroad to the Dominican
Republic improved in confidence and skill in communicating with residents, even with minimal or no ability to speak their language. Though this was a small group of nursing students, this service-learning course gave them the opportunity to have a positive impact on global chronic disease burden in this small community in Guadalajara, Mexico through preventative health education.

The results of this pilot mixed-method study support the use of international community engagement programs to meet both the needs of the student and community. Critical reflection, as a key outcome to achieving perspective transformation among students, can be facilitated through reflective journal writing and service opportunities in the host country. With no consensus on what student outcome to measure on community engagement programs, critical reflection and transformative learning emerge as overarching outcomes encompassing personal, professional, and cultural aspects. Educators can utilize the Reflection Questionnaire to capture this outcome among student participants. Reciprocity, an important characteristic of community engagement, should be validated through explicit measures of resident participant. There are ethical considerations when the focus of community engagement projects is solely on student outcomes (Pechak & Thompson, 2011). Such ethical concerns can be addressed by working in collaboration with community stakeholders to identify the needs of the community and by evaluating the impact on the residents after the community engagement project.

**Conclusion**

As higher education advances in the 21st century, international community engagement must be a high priority because of the tremendous potential for critical reflection and
transformative learning to take place. Through international community engagement, students can be profoundly impacted personally and professionally, and better prepared to meet the needs of the global community. Reflection and reciprocity are vital components to effective community engagement programs. Organizers of community engagement programs are challenged to validate reciprocity by measuring community impact as well as student learning. Researchers in this study successfully measured both. Students participating in the service-learning program to Guadalajara, Mexico experienced moderately high levels of transformative learning and were likely to have engaged in transformative learning. Student participants described change in Spanish language and nursing skills competency, and cultural perspective. Resident participants experienced significant change in knowledge on four of the seven health promotion topics in addition to receiving hygiene products. Research is needed to capture the depth of the impact on the community where service-learning takes place by assessing resident outcomes at various points in time. The long-term impact on the students’ careers and continued participation in community engagement should also be explored in future studies.

References


**About the Author**

Colleen Walters is an assistant professor in the College of Nursing at Clayton State University.
Abstract
The hero concept is tightly woven into the fabric of American and Western cultural identity. This hero is more icon than human, more mythic than mortal. Ordinary individuals often have little connection to these larger than life characters. Their heroes generally bear little resemblance to the outsized projections splashed across social media, television, movies, and theater. Instead, ordinary individuals choose everyday people as heroes—family members, neighbors, coaches, teachers—with whom they have a personal connection. Social constructionists believe individuals’ perspective of the world is based on their relationships and the experiences that result from those relationships. Using phenomenology and arts-based research, a study was conducted with 18–25-year-old students attending Tennessee State University, an HBCU in Nashville, to explore the archetype of the everyday hero, and how this relationship can shape and transform an individual’s life. Unlike with well-documented and researched iconic heroes, knowledge concerning people’s experiences and interactions with everyday heroes is limited. This study provides insight into that relationship, while expanding existing knowledge of the hero archetype. The visual art component acts as a catalyst for deep inquiry exploring experiences with, connections to, and interactions with everyday heroes. Significant knowledge is accessed concerning this relationship that illustrates the transfer of cultural and generational knowledge that influences, shapes, and also transforms.

Introduction
In popular fiction, the fantasy genre, and fairy tales, the image of the elusive hero is prevalent. Such stories describe a hero who is superhuman like Hercules or Superman. Or he might be a god that is larger than life. Or he is a commanding white knight on an impetuous and high-spirited steed. Regardless of his physical appearance, this hero is male, reticent, mysterious, sensual, and has a mythic quality.

History is littered with monuments and other architectural paraphernalia that recount astounding feats of bravery and victory by leaders and their armies against a despised enemy. The historical lens clothes these conquerors in a cloak of celebration, rarity, and legend. Religion, (i.e., the Bible, etc.), also includes stories that are built around winsome, reluctant, engaging, and even surprising heroes and heroines, (e.g., David and Goliath, Judith and Holofernes).

So, who then is a hero? Although the Western concept of the hero is rooted in the Greek mythology of demigods and superhuman feats, comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell's The Hero of a Thousand Faces (1949) found that in almost every culture and civilization there has been a hero figure—an individual, usually male, who either voluntarily leaves, or is forced to leave, his community to pursue a quest or goal. During the journey the hero encounters several trials, (e.g., obstacles, challenges) that he must overcome while simultaneously developing a set of skills he must master. As a result, the hero transforms from an idealistic youth into an experienced, mature adult who returns home with the honed skills and knowledge that are vital to the survival of his community. Campbell's concepts have been widely read, adapted, and broadly disseminated in various media, most notably in George Lucas' Star Wars saga (Gordon, 1978, p. 320).

Yet, research concerning the “everyday hero,” an ordinary individual who performs mundane acts of heroism, has received limited study. While everyday heroism may be defined differently by each individual, (e.g., a parent sacrificing a move to a better job to aid a spouse's career, a child shouldering the responsibility for younger siblings after a parent's death), this adaptability is what makes the everyday hero such a strong, valuable resource. As a means of exploring the everyday hero relationship, a phenomenological and arts-based research study was designed and conducted with students enrolled in art appreciation and art history courses taught by the author during fall 2016 and spring 2017. The question guiding the research study was: How does the archetype of the everyday hero transfer knowledge to others in a way that shapes and transforms their lives?
In addition, several sub-questions supported the inquiry: What type of interactions and experiences are common, and significant for individuals within this relationship? What cultural and generational knowledge, or other information is transferred through this relationship? What impact has relating to an everyday hero had in the participant's life? Participants completed an essay that discussed their everyday hero, designed and created a shoe for their everyday hero, and presented their everyday hero and shoe to their classmates. The combination of written, artistic, and oral components within the study allowed participants to access conscious and tacit knowledge concerning their personal values, as well as offer insights regarding the people and things, (e.g., experiences, memories, actions) they find meaningful.

What then does a hero look like in contemporary culture? Prior to the 1960s, the hero mantle was placed on an individual's shoulder who had shown valor, courage, and strength in the face of difficult circumstances and triumphed. Heroes were victors. They were also white, male, and over 50 (Graebner, 2013). The cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, along with television, film, and public relations, dramatically changed this definition. Suddenly, the names associated with hero shifted away from world leaders to actors such as Lee Majors, who played “The Six Million Dollar Man” on the popular television drama. By 2016, the concept of a hero had again shifted from media and entertainment stars to celebrities of media.

America, as a nation, is interwoven with the concept of the hero. However, this definition differs from the one Campbell described. For instance, Hollywood mythologized the hero through the American Western lone male iconography (Kaulingrek, 2009). By this definition, the hero is cloaked in mystery and danger, refuses to adhere to anyone else’s rules, revels in his rugged individualism, and cares little about society or the larger culture. This image remains prevalent in contemporary media and popular culture. Conversely, in mainstream America, the hero title has traditionally been bestowed on national or political figures— for example, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Glenn, Ronald Reagan (Graebner, 2013). By the 1970s and 1980s, the image of the hero had broadened to include women and people of color, for example, Cheryl Ladd from “Charlie’s Angels” and the National Football League's Walter Payton (Graebner, 2013).

In contrast to the previously described heroes, ordinary people typically do not relate to the larger than life society and media appointed heroes. Instead their heroes are everyday people, who are within their personal sphere, and often bear little resemblance to the supersized personalities elevated by the press, magazines, movies, television, or the Internet. So, who then are the individuals that bear the hero mantle for ordinary people? What makes their heroes heroic?

Social Construction

From a social construction perspective, an individual's ideas about the world are created or constructed. Moreover, these ideas derive from our various relationships that help us know and understand not only the world in which we live, but also our place in it. “What we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” (Gergen, 2009, p. 2). Our lives are constructed through relationships, and those relationships shape the way individuals see and operate within the world (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gergen, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Our earliest connections to other human beings is through our relationships with our parents. What happens, or conversely does not happen, in those relationships—as well as in other significant relationships—affect, influence, and shape us in minute and grand ways. Moreover, these experiences, relationships, and connections offer each person a unique lens through which to view, perceive, and engage with others and the world. Just as these relationships are pivotal to an individual, so are the stories that derive from and are associated with them. Stories teach us how to live, but even more than that they offer characters that we can connect to and with. Moreover, these characters can become models that show us who we want to be, or how we want to live in the world we create. This then is where heroes come in.

The Everyday Hero

Although the iconic hero has been well researched and documented, the everyday hero has received limited study. Moreover, iconic heroes typically generate an array of interest from various media outlets such as network news, the Internet, entertainment channels, television pundits, and political authorities. In contrast, knowledge concerning people's experiences with everyday heroes is limited. In a 2016 and 2017 study of college students using phenomenology and arts-based research, participants were asked to examine their relationship, experiences, and interactions
with an everyday hero. The intent of the study was to discover and understand the deeper meaning underlying such experiences (Englander, 2012), and provide insight concerning the everyday hero aspect of the hero archetype. In addition, the study provided an opportunity to interject fresh, diverse voices into the existing social science academic conversation in general, and the everyday hero discussion in particular (Leavy, 2015).

**Methods**

The study focused on an exploration of the relationship with an everyday hero. The research was guided by the following research questions: How does the archetype of the everyday hero transfer knowledge to others in a way that shapes and transforms their lives? What type of interactions and experiences are common, and significant for individuals within this relationship? What cultural and generational knowledge, or other information is transferred through this relationship? What impact has relating to an everyday hero had in the participant's life?

The questions were explored through qualitative phenomenology and arts-based research methods. The intent was to discover and understand the deeper meaning of experiences with an everyday hero. As a result, participants were probed for “the knowledge of the content of the experience, often in depth, to seek the meaning of the phenomenon” (Englander, 2012, p. 21). By examining the phenomenological experience, participants were also asked how the knowledge that was received within this relationship has shaped, changed, and/or transformed their lives.

**Arts-based Research**

The study included an art project designed to help participants access their creativity, memory, and feelings as a means of meaning making. The appeal of arts-based research lies in its flexibility, as well as its openness to diverse participants, and to new ways of information gathering and evaluation (Leavy, 2015). It also allows for the artistic-scholar to combine elements of traditional qualitative research with artistic practice. For many years academic research has confined itself to traditional methods of gathering and analyzing data from study participants. Unfortunately, methods such as written questionnaires, surveys, etc. are limited in the types of information that can be gathered. Typically, such research instruments are unable to delve deeply into participants’ experiences and knowledge. Since the aim of this study was to elicit information concerning meaning making, a form of research gathering that extends beyond the barriers of conventional research was warranted (Huss & Cwikel, 2005).

Arts-based research can integrate a variety of art media, (for example, writing, storytelling, dance, poetry, visual art, music, clowning). As a result, the adaptable and versatile nature of the method allows researchers to ask new questions, to ask them in unusual ways, and to reach untapped audiences as study participants, or as recipients for their research findings (Leavy, 2015). Moreover, its experimental and experienced-based nature provides greater avenues for study and ultimately, more in-depth understanding of a community or culture. Arts-based research then has broad application, and offers researchers a means of building a multi-layered, complex web of knowledge.

In addition, the method allows a diverse chorus of voices to be acknowledged. Too often historically, certain voices, (i.e., women, non-whites, people with special needs, etc.) and their unique perspectives have been unheard. This wider array of voices is typically not sought out since they do not fit neatly within the Western dialogue that favors the white male perspective (Huss and Cwikel, 2005). In contrast, arts-based methods expand the research landscape by providing spaces where every participants’ unique voice and experience are valued. This leads to previously untapped knowledge that is rich with insight, diversity, and depth (Leavy, 2015). Finally, the adaptability of arts-based research unearths greater avenues for study and ultimately, a more in-depth, complex understanding and knowledge of our existing culture (Leavy, 2015; Huss and Cwikel, 2005).

The project included in the research study asked each participant to design a shoe for their everyday hero. Why a shoe? From shoe advertising campaigns featuring well-known sports figures like LeBron James and Serena Williams, to rock star status shoe designers like Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik, to shoe companies with a social conscience (e.g., TOMS), shoes carry lots of weight in the global culture. They are multifaceted symbols of travelers and journeys. For example, a businessman’s hard sole lace-up differs from a fireman’s heavy heat-resistant boot, or a ballroom dancer’s flexible soft-soled shoe. Each shoe is distinctive, yet implies a specific path that is appropriate for each individual’s journey. Regardless of the profession or style of footwear, the everyday hero’s shoe offers a glimpse into his or her identity, life, and style.
Participants

A total of 17 undergraduate students aged 18–25 years old agreed to participate in the everyday hero study. Participants were students who were enrolled in one of the courses I had taught during the 2016–2017 school year at Tennessee State University. TSU is one of 107 public and private HBCUs in the nation. Founded in 1912, the university traditionally served the African American community. The current student body, though, is a diverse mix of students, including African American, Native American, Asian American, Caucasian and Hispanic, along with an array of international students from around the globe.

The data for the study originated from a required assignment in my Art Appreciation and Art History courses. The course project consisted of: 1) writing a 1–2 page essay that described the student's everyday hero, what made the individual a hero, and their relationship with their everyday hero; 2) an art project that asked each student to design and create a model of a shoe for their everyday hero; and 3) a 5–8 minute presentation to the class that discussed their everyday hero and the shoe they created. The study lasted approximately two weeks. A total of 17 students—seven from fall 2016 and 10 from spring 2017—submitted their school assignments to the study. The participants were derived from a pool of 112 students who completed one of the four Art Appreciation courses, or one of the two Art History courses offered during those semesters. The study participants were African American women, except for two women—one of whom was Vietnamese and the other white—and four African American men. Prior to participating in the study, each participant was required to read and sign an Informed Consent Form. All who completed one of the six courses received five bonus course points regardless of whether they submitted their assignment to the study. This was done to prevent any student from feeling pressured to participate or penalized for not submitting their assignment to the study.

Procedures

To participate in the research study, each student was asked to:

1) Watch a 7-minute segment of the Power of Myth where Joseph Campbell defines the characteristics of the hero. Then using Campbell's definition of a hero or heroine (ex-departure, fulfillment, and return), select a contemporary (21st century), little known or unrecognized person that they believed fulfilled the role of a hero. Next, they wrote a 1–2 page essay that described their everyday hero, the situation or circumstances that made him or her their hero, and their relationship and experience with their everyday hero.

2) Design and create a three-dimensional model of a shoe that would help their hero in their daily work and life. In designing the shoe, participants considered: a) the type of work their hero/heroine does, b) whether that work requires lots of frequent standing, walking, or moving, c) if the look of/surface design of their everyday hero's shoe is important.

3) Present their everyday hero and shoe model to the class in a 5–8 minute presentation.

4) Submit a copy of their essay and four photographs of their shoe model showing the front, back, left side, right side to the research study.

Since the original data source was a course assignment, data analysis did not occur until after the close of each semester and students' grades had been submitted. All personal identifying information was removed from each participant's submission, and each data source was given a unique identifier (e.g., EF2016001). This identifier code indicated the data type (E = essay, P = photograph), semester, and participant number.

Content analysis was used to discover patterns and themes. Such an analysis can identify specific meanings and messages that are embedded in the data. Moreover, content analysis is typically applied to various forms of human communication, such as written material (e.g., letters, papers, emails), photographs, film, and video (Berg, 2007). The process of close reading and interpretation can lead to a broad understanding of specific material and the discovery of new perspectives on collective meaning and knowledge.

Although content analysis can be a time-consuming process, qualitative data analysis software offers the advantage of examining and analyzing large amounts of data quickly. Additionally, these specialized software programs—for example, Atlas.ti and NVivo—allow researchers to view and analyze data from various perspectives. In addition, different types of data can be coded and then examined to identify specific themes, concepts, and ideas. Atlas.ti was the software program used to analyze the data for this research study.

Findings

Seventeen students submitted their work to the everyday hero research study. Thirteen of the participants were women, while four participants...
were men. The participants were young adults, aged 18–25 years old, whose classification ranged from freshman to graduating senior. Six of the participants were art majors, while the remaining 11 were not.

Through their essays the participants shared stories and memories about their everyday hero that illustrated patterns of behavior. Although each life and story was unique, behavioral similarities revealed patterns related to a generosity of spirit and heart, along with a willingness to forge long-term, nurturing relationships along generational and cultural lines. Many of the relationships had familial connections. Yet, other relationships were formed with individuals within the participants’ personal circle, (i.e., best friend, teacher, etc.). From these behavior patterns five themes emerged from the data. The themes in order of their frequency are: motivated/inspired/admire, shouldering responsibility/sacrifice, nurturing and encouragement, adversity, and death and loss.

The emergent themes illustrate that for study participants, the actions of the everyday hero are profoundly influential. For example, the themes that were discussed most frequently were: motivated/inspired/admire, (i.e., 43 instances), shouldering responsibility/sacrifice, (i.e., 30 instances), and nurturing and encouragement, (i.e., 27 instances). This indicates that what an everyday hero does carries more influence than verbal proclamations. Moreover, the motivated/inspired/admire theme illustrates that participants view the everyday hero as a realistic role model whose life circumstances may be similar to their own. As an individual who is admired, the everyday hero inspires the participant’s thoughts and actions, and offers a motivating demonstration of how to live in the world. Sarah reiterates this idea by pointing to her reason for studying music education. She wants “to follow [in] the steps of [her everyday hero], and give back to students like [he] gave to me.”

Another recurring theme is shouldering responsibility/sacrifice, which means sacrificing one’s own needs for the benefit of others and accepting significant responsibility to ensure the well-being of others. Dana’s hero “took on the responsibility of taking care of her brothers while trying to finish her senior year of high school.” Similarly, Caitlyn’s grandfather has a practice of providing “people in the family money, rides, food, and even a place to stay when they need it.” These examples indicate that participants are learning by witnessing the everyday hero in action. Through the everyday hero relationship, they receive lessons in responsibility, problem-solving, and personal values.

The nurturing and encouragement theme relates to the everyday hero’s nurturing presence in the study participant’s life. Encouragement is demonstrated through continuous words of wisdom, counsel, and advice. For example, Annette describes her everyday hero as a person who “encourages me to fight and stay strong as well. She has always been someone I could talk to.” In addition, the everyday hero’s actions illustrate caring and concern through loving interactions and nurturing support, (i.e., emotional, physical, financial, etc.). Erica’s everyday hero:

does outstanding things like going above and beyond to protect, provide, and mostly unconditionally love me. Whenever I may feel alone, all I have to do is make one phone call and it feels as if she’s here with me even being miles away. Whenever I fear [something], all I have to do is express it to her and I no longer have tears. I could be having the worse day and before the night is [over] she’s giving me a call or sending me an encouraging text letting me know that everything is going to be okay. It’s like she just always knows exactly what to say or do to take the pain away.

Continuous nurturing from the everyday hero is an important source of emotional support for participants.

Although the study’s emergent themes have nuanced differences, they are also interrelated. While shouldering responsibility and sacrificing oneself for others demonstrates a generous spirit and strength of character, it also offers participants’ a model of living that is admirable and inspiring. Additionally, the remaining two themes—adversity, and death and loss—share some commonalities. Adversity was discussed 22 times by participants, and describes an everyday hero who has experienced and/or overcome a major life challenge, (i.e., loss of a job, spouse or child, illness, etc.). Despite the odds or circumstances, they have persevered and achieved a measure of triumph or at least peace. Hannah says:

My mom has dealt [with] a lot of suffering and hardships in her life. When she and dad left Vietnam, she left behind her entire family and moved to America without even knowing a drop [of] the language. This is the bravest decision
anyone could make. My mom was 32 and had to face obstacles that sometimes were too big to face on her own.

Death and loss (i.e., 10 mentions) also relates to personal struggles and difficulties. This theme refers to the everyday hero who has experienced significant emotional or financial loss, (i.e., divorce, abandonment, job loss, etc.) or physical death, (i.e., family member, friend, significant individual, etc.). Although both themes deal with disappointment, grief, and tragedy, the everyday hero models ways that participants can deal with challenging situations. In addition, witnessing the way the everyday hero deals with these situations provides motivation for participants when dealing with their own challenges. For instance, Bettye describes how her young nephew, who struggles with a life-threatening illness, motivates her:

He has taught me patience, how to remain faithful, to always stay humble, to be strong when you're feeling weak and to hold your head up high because there are people in this world that are doing worse than you.

As Nikki shared about her mother's cancer:

It's hard for me to see her this way, but I tell myself that now it's my turn to stay by her side when she gets depressed. Even though my mother is going through this she hasn't become weak mentally. At college I sometimes get tired from so much work and figuring out my future that I sometimes want to just give up. I start to think about the challenges that she is going through, how hard she is working to beat cancer. It gives me the drive to work harder.

Discussion

The hero archetype is woven into the fabric of American society, as well as the global culture in many forms. Although such iconic heroes have been well documented and researched, in contrast everyday heroes have garnered limited attention. Everyday heroes live ordinary lives and receive little attention outside their own social and family circles. Yet, they are impactful and influential. Through the relationships they form, everyday heroes quietly and with little fanfare shape others through their continuous encouragement, personal sacrifice, and modeling behavior. As a result, the personal relationships with the everyday hero is a prime conductor of cultural and generational values and knowledge.

In our phenomenological and arts-based research study based on a course assignment, undergraduate students were asked to identify an everyday hero and then explore that relationship. The majority of the everyday heroes were drawn from familial (parent, grandparent, godparent) or personal circles, (coach, friend). Participants clearly saw successful living strategies in their everyday hero's personal triumphs and struggles. Moreover, participants valued opportunities to talk with, learn from, and receive guidance from the everyday hero. Study participants illustrated that they are keen observers of human nature and interaction, (i.e., admirable qualities, devastating losses, nurturing behavior, etc.). Moreover, they are not simply chronicling others interact, instead they are learning important lessons about humanity, cultural values, and responsible thought and action. Many participants saw the everyday heroes’ handling of difficult experiences as a means of inspiration and admiration. As a result, they are modeling agents that led participants to change their own perspective and behavior. The everyday hero then is more than a role model, but instead an inspirational impetus leading to value and character development.

The process of shoe creation encouraged participants to critically examine their relationship with the everyday hero, and provided a concrete way to illustrate the participant's feelings and memories. The participant's shoe offers a visual manifestation of the everyday hero's journey, and reiterates the written narrative. Often the aesthetic value of the shoe is outweighed by the conceptual ideas that the shoes represent (i.e., perseverance, foresight, responsibility, etc.). In describing her everyday hero's shoe, Caitlyn says,

He is older and has health problems so it helps support him even when he feels week [sic]. I chose a work boot over any other kind of boot because it shows the amount of work he does not only for the family but in the home as well.

As a result of creating the shoe and writing the essay, participants recognized, acknowledged, and celebrated the transformative aspects of the relationship with their everyday hero. Finally, the class presentations of the everyday heroes and their shoes was also transformative. Through
listening, hearing, and witnessing through tears, laughter, and pain participants discovered common experiences that connected them to one another through the stories that were told. The classroom space became a charged environment of remembrance and vision. An ordinary classroom of a diverse group of students simply wanting to pass a course shifted into a transformative, connective space. In sharing, the students became a linked body where culture, race, or major no longer mattered. Instead bridges of understanding, bonding, and knowing were formed.

Implications

The everyday hero assignment worked well in my courses and with my students. Several students, particularly the young women, found the idea of selecting a hero, creating the shoe, and then talking about their hero an enjoyable experience. They viewed the assignment as an opportunity to honor someone who was important to them, which was personally rewarding. Moreover, the project acknowledged their cultural values and heritage. Within communal cultures honoring elders and acknowledging their wisdom is culturally significant. While the practice celebrates specific individuals, it also provides a means of strengthening the bonds of personal support and maintaining a connection to the larger community.

In addition, projects similar to the everyday hero allow students to incorporate their personal experiences and lives into the academic environment, which may at times seem an unforgiving place. The classroom can seem a strange, foreign place for students from families, neighborhoods, and communities that do not value, support, or advocate higher education. Students from households where the focus is on the family's basic needs and/or survival may be the first in the family to attend college, or sometimes even graduate from high school. Moreover, these students quickly learn that to succeed in academia, they must put aside their personal experiences, feelings, and voice in favor of the objective perspective valued in Western higher learning. Such practices unnecessarily teach students to separate their home lives from their academic lives rather than offer ways to integrate the two.

Instead of being distant and unfamiliar, the classroom can be a welcoming place for students' whole selves, where the combining of home with academia is celebrated and valued. Assignments that allow students to access personal experiences, memories, stories, and deeply rooted knowledge can help them engage with curriculum topics in more significant ways. Moreover, asking questions and creating assignments that encourage accessing tacit knowledge and wisdom help to enhance student learning inside the classroom, as well as beyond the university walls. Finally, incorporating meaningful artistic creations when designing assignments and projects offers students avenues for a deeper understanding of and engagement with the community of which they are a part.

References


About the Author

Cynthia Gadsden is an assistant professor of art history at Tennessee State University. She holds the master of arts degree from Ohio University and is a candidate for the PhD from the California Institute of Integral Studies.
Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance: Breaching, Reaching, and Teaching

Katari Coleman

Abstract
The Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) has operated for more than 25 years with the purpose of training and educating the Tennessee early childhood workforce. TECTA has removed barriers to postsecondary educational attainment for its students by specifically addressing issues of locality and affordability. This paper provides an explicit look at the factors and processes behind these promising practices for Tennessee's early childhood workforce.

Introduction
Since the late 20th century, numerous studies have demonstrated that teacher education and training is one of the strongest predictors of early childhood program quality, with a positive relationship reported between the teacher's preparation and children's experiences (Gable & Halliburton, 2003.) More than 25 years ago, Tennessee State University developed the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) in response to these and similar research findings to address barriers to postsecondary educational attainment through quality professional development opportunities for Tennessee's early childhood workforce. TECTA began as a community-based project and developed into a full-fledged statewide professional development program. Today TECTA provides opportunities for professional growth through training, college tuition support, postsecondary credential support and advisement, program accreditation technical assistance, and higher education instructional support. These opportunities allow TECTA to address tangible and criterion-based issues of accessibility for Tennessee's early childhood workforce.

TECTA is one of several child care workforce initiatives supported by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, the Child Care and Development Fund's (CCDF) lead agency in the State of Tennessee. To support low-income families that are working or participating in education and training, CCDF provides federal funding to pay for and improve the quality of child care for all children (Office of Child Care, 2016). Expectations from CCDF, guided by industry research, have led to a continual push to professionalize the early childhood workforce through suitable training and education. Starting in the 1920s, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established professional standards that support the existence of TECTA and numerous comparable initiatives across the nation. Professionals in the early childhood workforce are provided a body of knowledge to guide and inform them in their work. In addition, these standards establish expectations around early childhood environments, instructional approach and documentation, family engagement, and child assessment. NAEYC standards are the foundation of TECTA's training and education opportunities to meet the needs of the entire early childhood workforce.

The NAEYC standards and competencies are the focus of TECTA's orientation classes, and are combined with college coursework to support the acquisition of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. TECTA offers five distinct orientation classes that include the following topics: Administrator, Center-Based, Family Child Care, Infant/Toddler, and School Age. The CDA, created and supported by the NAEYC and currently administered through the Council for Professional Recognition, is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education and serves as a stepping stone on the path of career advancement in the field. This process is available to individuals in all 95 counties across Tennessee through TECTA's eight-site system. These sites are located in specific institutions of higher education and work to reach all early childhood programs and potential early childhood professionals across their service area. The orientation classes, which initiate TECTA's professional process toward the CDA or other postsecondary educational opportunities, occur across the service area. These classes are available to everyone, do not require prerequisite qualifications, and satisfy two years of
Tennessee child care training requirements. There is an intentional effort to run these 30-hour classes in accessible locales, sometimes making use of community-based spaces like churches and child care programs. Online orientation class options have recently been made available.

A major hurdle for the early childhood workforce is the affordability and availability of postsecondary education opportunities, particularly for those currently working in the field. This is due in part to the low wages associated with the profession. According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2018), nationally child care workers are nearly in the bottom percentile when all occupations are ranked by annual earnings, with the average hourly pay rate between $9 and $13. This means child care workers earn less than two-thirds of the median wage for all occupations, which is a common threshold for classifying work as low wage. TECTA mitigates the cost barrier for this population by providing substantial tuition support for the CDA credential, technical certificates, and associate, bachelor, and advanced degrees. The only requirement is to complete the orientation class to demonstrate time commitment and knowledge of basic child care competencies.

TECTA also addresses criterion access, which refers to the ability to meet the necessary requisites to take college courses. For example, most postsecondary programs require the completion of entrance assessments like the ACT (American College Testing). For adult learners wishing to enroll in a Tennessee community college program, an assessment is required prior to enrollment that determines the academic level of the student and in what courses the student should enroll to begin their collegiate journey, with an emphasis on critical thinking, writing, and mathematics. TECTA’s population usually comes with diverse educational backgrounds and usually satisfies the workforce’s minimal requirements; however, they may not have previous postsecondary experience or test-taking skills.

In most states, the baseline requirements to work in child care are to be 18 years of age, be able to pass a criminal background check, receive clearance from a physician to work with children, and have either a high school diploma or a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). These baseline requirements mean some individuals may not be ready for the compulsory classes needed to obtain the CDA due to their underdeveloped test-taking skills. To address these gaps, TECTA developed a relationship with the Tennessee Board of Regents, which provides oversight to all state community colleges, 12 of which are currently working with TECTA to meet the needs of the workforce. Students supported by TECTA are not required to take the entry assessment for the four CDA prep courses if they complete a TECTA orientation class. This allows students to gain both the skills and confidence to take the CDA prep courses at a later date if they wish to pursue a certificate or degree in the future. Thus, students experience and appreciate the teaching and learning, and embrace the competencies and concepts they receive in the class. This relationship is continuously strengthened as TECTA hosts an annual higher education institute to provide vital professional development to early childhood education faculty members across the state, and maintains a network that supports TECTA students.

In the past five years alone, TECTA provided training and educational support to 7,404 child care professionals. This includes both traditional, face-to-face, and online (via the university’s e-learn system) training opportunities. While these opportunities attract both inexperienced and seasoned child care professionals, the program database reveals that 65% of TECTA-supported students have 11 or more years of experience.

In the spring of 2017, 374 TECTA-supported students who completed orientation classes were surveyed. This was TECTA’s first substantial data collection effort that spanned multiple training and educational events. Previous (pre-2016) data collection only focused on participant competencies, instructor skills, and instructional strategies, and occurred at the end of each event. Because this data collection only happens at the site level, each TECTA site has the responsibility for responding to red flags and reporting the issues to TECTA’s management team. Red flags are concerns that suggest inadequate or inappropriate instructional delivery. The new survey provided past participants the ability to share information on multiple training and education events, and share their present professional status.

This mixed-method, cross-sectional descriptive design engaged a randomly selected population that came from the program’s database extending back some 15 years, and was approved by Tennessee State University’s Institutional Review Board. The researchers established reliability of the survey instrument by sourcing questions from
previously administered large-scale surveys like WestEd’s Evaluation of Professional Development for Child Care Providers in California (WestEd, 2014). After several iterations, to make certain the intended goals of the survey were reached, the researchers applied a test/re-test methodology with a small sample of participants. This yielded a .80 correlation coefficient average between scores on measures, which indicated positive test reliability. In addition, subject matter experts from TECTA evaluated the test items against the decided test specifications to establish content validity.

The responses were checked for completeness—as some questions did not have answers or were missing acceptable information—and edited for spelling and basic grammar. Beyond categorization of survey participants in groups, there was a text search query of the open-ended responses to identify themes. For example, to gain insight into the respondents’ views of the utility of the information provided in the orientation classes, TECTA posed the question, “How have you used the information you learned from the TECTA orientation?” The respondents’ answers generated the categories listed in Table 1.

Findings
All five of the TECTA orientations (Administrator, Center-Based, Family Child Care, Infant/Toddler, and School Age) serve as regularly-attended modes of training (Table 1). More than half of the survey respondents (53%) took more than one orientation, with some reporting that they took eight single orientations. The Center-Based orientation is the most frequently attended orientation, followed closely by the Administrator orientation. All but 3% of the respondents strongly agree/agree that the TECTA orientation is of high quality (Table 2).

TECTA’s commitment to high-quality instruction and goal of providing participants with the opportunity to continue their postsecondary education allows participants to embark on the next steps of their professional development. The survey exhibited that 79% of respondents utilized TECTA postsecondary services beyond the orientation, while 6% plan to utilize the services in the future. The specific nature in which survey respondents utilized or plan to utilize TECTA services after completing an orientation class is further defined in Table 3.

The following comments from TECTA participants highlight the individuals’ gratitude for the TECTA program, and the specific knowledge and/or application of knowledge due to their TECTA experience:

As a teacher with no formal training, I learned that I was one important first step in a child’s early development and that I was engaged in best practices and age-appropriate activities. I did not know about theory and child development prior and TECTA helped me be a professional in the field. (I had the opportunity of being in one of the first classes.) Later, as a director, I used the information to improve my staff’s development and my program. It definitely was a stepping stone in having one of the best programs in my county at the time.

I have used TECTA information while working with children in and out of the center. By having the knowledge and techniques I learned in TECTA, I better understand the needs of children and what is developmentally appropriate for each individual child. I know how to set up the best learning environment and provide the best quality care for children. I have also learned how to provide support and resources for my parents of typical and non-typical children. As an administrator

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Total number of orientations = 475

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<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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Total number of orientations = 373
I learned the financial aspects of running a center while providing a safe, healthy environment for my community and its families.

Interestingly, these two respondents discussed their professional growth, as both progressed from teaching and directly working with children to working as administrators. Their professional TECTA journey, as with numerous others, began with the TECTA orientation. In conclusion, as the importance of early childhood draws more attention, TECTA believes similarly to the National Academy of Sciences that the early childhood workforce needs to be “unified by the foundation of the science of child development and early learning of children birth to age eight” (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). When individuals in the workforce, no matter the status of their professional career, receive specialized training like the TECTA orientation, and more importantly, credentials like the CDA, academic certificates, and degrees to reflect the bodies of knowledge needed to educate young children, this can accomplished. TECTA’s approach has resulted in more than 25 years of services that have shown to be effective, promising practices that elevate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies of those that work with our nation’s most valuable resource, our children.

Lessons Learned

Based on the results of the TECTA surveys, we recommend that other early childhood professional development programs survey their participants’ utility of program services, along with their attitude/opinion of their experience(s). Surveys should query participants about all components of the process from enrollment/registration to completion of the training event, or related service. TECTA invested in a database that documents participants’ use of program services, which has proven valuable (Table 4). Similar databases should track activities from each participant’s initial contact with the program to the most recent service obtained. Survey questions should reflect the program’s goals and objectives, and capture participation trends that have been observed over time. These questions should be a mixture of closed questions (e.g. Likert scale) to measure attitudes and opinions, and open-ended questions to compel participants to share details about their experiences. Lastly, though TECTA’s research efforts detailed in this manuscript were subsequent to 25 years of service to the Tennessee child care workforce, assessment of effectiveness is best when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilization Categories</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use information daily (non-specific)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use developmentally appropriate practices</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with lesson plan development: activities, curriculum</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist in work with families</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism: postsecondary achievement, networking</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postsecondary Services (Opportunities)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed academic Child Development Associate (CDA) prep course</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA advisement</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of CDA</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Technical Certificate (TC)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Advanced (Graduate) Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took academic course but did not yet complete CDA, TC, or degree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation financial support (prior to 2013)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation technical assistance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Administrator credential</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Participant Utilization of TECTA Services Beyond Orientation

Table 4. TECTA Orientation Information Utilization
implemented early and often. TECTA plans to implement similar large-scale surveys every 3–5 years to remain responsive to the needs of both program participants and the field at-large.

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About the Author

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Building Bridges with Big Brothers Big Sisters: Service-learning Links Between Professional and Civic Engagement Education at a Predominantly Black Institution

Susan McFarlane-Alvarez and Shandra McDonald

Abstract
During spring and fall semesters of 2017, Clayton State University students in corporate communication minor courses collaborated with film production majors to raise awareness for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Atlanta. Through this three-way collaboration, students helped to build tactical communication with the objective of increasing interest among potential volunteers for the organization’s mentoring program. The deliverables included three videos that Big Brothers Big Sisters used in its drive to increase the number of volunteer mentors in the communities for both the organization and Clayton State. This paper examines the importance of community-engaged service-learning for a student population at a minority-serving predominantly Black institution in Morrow, Georgia, part of the Atlanta metropolitan area. As part of Clayton State’s broader community engagement initiative, this collaboration is being evaluated using a case study design. Consequently, we examine the interdisciplinary roots of the initiative while positioning professional and civic education as simultaneously achievable. Ultimately the research positions Clayton State as a centrifuge for collaborative experience, which serves this dual purpose.

Theoretical Backdrop
While the earlier body of research that focused on service-learning does not take Black institutions significantly into consideration, these colleges and universities have a long and important history of civic engagement. Gasman, Spencer, and Orphan (2015) provide a detailed review of civic engagement initiatives among mostly private Black colleges. Service-learning is recognized as leading to greater civic engagement among students, providing a philosophical justification for both civic education and service-learning by “reclaiming the historic civic purpose of higher education” (p. 347). Further, two possible reasons are provided for why HBCUs had not been included in earlier conversations about civic education and service-learning. Firstly, the claim is made that HBCUs have not themselves become active participants in the conversations about service-learning. Secondly, these institutions have been overlooked in the scholarly literature in this area. The point of these observations is that service-learning and civic engagement exist to significant degrees at HBCUs but remain unrecognized and unaccounted. Lomax (2006), on the other hand, notes, “For historically Black colleges and universities, engagement is not an enhancement of their curriculum, but part of their birthright” (p. 5).

With greater focus on the issue of race as it intersects with civic engagement, in African Americans and Community Engagement in Higher Education, the authors call for scholars and practitioners to consider issues of race when researching and implementing service-learning initiatives (Evans, Taylor, Dunlap, & Miller, 2009). The issue of race is further examined by Stevens (2003), who sets out to highlight unrecognized service-learning embedded in African American social thought and action. In particular, recognition is given to the early work of “Negro” institutions like the church, Black colleges, and other civic-minded organizations. An example of such early precedents is the role of Ida B. Wells-Barnett in promoting service-learning and civic engagement through the Negro Scholarship League. Through her stewardship, Wells-Barnett mobilized a Sunday School-originated group to help incoming Black migrants to the Chicago area by offering community action programs (see https://blackmail4u.com/2019/02/09/4781/). In activities of this kind, Stevens (2003) cites the unrecognized roots of social action and education within the African American community.

While the philosophies of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington are often pitted against each other, in the realm of education and civic
engagement, Du Bois and Washington are in fact more alike than different in their approaches. Stevens (2003) considers Du Bois, who "also used a facsimile of the service-learning philosophy during his early teaching experiences" (p. 30). Similarly, Washington believed that a traditional university education could be enhanced by ensuring that students were actively engaged in labor and acquiring knowledge of practical trades. The essential role of engaged learning at Black universities and colleges is effectively summarized by Gasman et al. (2015), in the statement that, “Historically Black institutions, however, always had, as the right ventricle, a fourth purpose—the pursuit of social justice, which is the core of civic engagement, and the strengthening of democracy” (p. 374). Through a consideration of Washington and Du Bois, Gasman et al. (2015) posit that pitting the two perspectives of academia—professional versus civic—against each other is a false dichotomy. While Washington saw the necessity for Black students (and the wider African American society) to get to work in whatever way feasible within the segregated society, Du Bois saw good reason to educate an elite few, and let them fight for change by bringing together the talented tenth with the larger community of African Americans and creating a sense of collaboration. More pointedly, the article notes that HBCUs have always shown that higher education can serve both civic and professional functions and that the mission of higher education is strengthened by this dual pursuit. Here, as defined by Ehrlich (2000), the term civic engagement can be understood as work that makes “a difference in the civic life of the communities and develop a combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference” (p. vi).

While Clayton State University is neither an HBCU nor a private institution, as are those mentioned in the study by Gasman et al. (2015), the institution confronts similar social issues to its HBCU counterparts. In particular, according to the Dream Makers Scholarship Initiative (Clayton State’s Office of Giving (2018), 78% of Clayton State students demonstrate need with approximately 85% of them receiving financial assistance in the form of scholarships, grants, and loans. As Gasman et al. (2015) assert, HBCUs play a critical role in the “social, political, economic, personal and educational development of the Black communities” (p. 350). In this writing, we assert that Clayton State and other predominantly Black institutions can be similarly integral to the development of their surrounding communities.

Clayton State’s efforts in community engagement serve as an example of what can happen when students of a public, predominantly Black institution are encouraged to put their professional learning, liberal arts education, and commitment to civic engagement to work, simultaneously and strategically. As an example of community-engaged learning within what Gasman et al. (2015) refer to as the category of community organization collaborations, the Clayton State project with Big Brothers Big Sisters serves to illustrate the reality of higher education serving both civic and professional functions, building the students’ industrial capability and social employability while serving to strengthen the contextual community on multiple levels, including mutual achievement of strategic missions and goals between the university and its community partner.

In the case of the Big Brothers Big Sisters project, Clayton State students helped the organization advance its mission to improve the lives of youth, while Clayton State was able to further build its brand through community engagement and program development. In effect, examination of Clayton State’s collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters reveals several specific gains for the university, its students, the community, and the community partner, providing an example of a primarily Black institution fulfilling both its civic and professional function through community engagement.

The Community-Engaged Learning Project

In fall 2016, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta (see https://www.bbbsatl.org/) contacted Clayton State to request student involvement in raising awareness in the community surrounding the university. The nonprofit sought to recruit new volunteers, particularly Big Brothers, as they had increasing numbers of Little Brothers who had been unmatched. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (2019) is the largest mentoring network operating through donor and volunteer support in the United States. The nonprofit seeks to make monitored matches between adults and children who are often facing adversity with strong and enduring professionally supported one-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better. In its Annual Impact Report (Mitchell, 2019), the organization noted that through the mentoring program, children build higher aspirations, greater confidence, and better relationships. The mentoring is also reported to decrease the likelihood that the children will engage in risky behaviors, while
increasing their chances of educational success (Mitchell, 2019).

The community-engaged collaboration between Clayton State and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta fulfilled the professional learning outcomes, while also advancing the university’s civic engagement projects. Indeed, the mentoring within Big Brothers Big Sisters has long been associated with strengthening the community. In fact, according to a 1995 Public/Private Ventures study (see https://www.bigslittles.org/publicprivate-ventures-study/) that looked at over 950 boys and girls from eight Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies across the country, 46% were less likely to begin using illegal drugs; 27% were less likely to begin using alcohol; 52% were less likely to skip school, while “Littles” skipped half as many days of school as did their peers, though the direct relation revealed in this and similar studies may not prove causality.

Added to the role of Big Brothers Big Sisters in the wider metro community, it is also important to note Clayton State’s geographical and socio-economic context. While there has been some overall economic improvement in Clayton County since the time of this study, the situation at the time was not markedly different from today.

Clayton County is located to the south of the Atlanta Metro Area, and includes the seven cities of College Park, Forest Park, Jonesboro, Lake City, Lovejoy, Morrow, and Riverdale. With a 2019 population of 292,256, the county’s population is 69% Black, 9% white, 13% Hispanic, and 5% Asian, with 3% reporting two or more races. The county’s median household income in 2019 was $51,093, with a per capita income of $21,251, with 15.4% of the county’s population living in poverty (see Census Reporter, https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US13063-clayton-county-ga/).

Against this socioeconomic backdrop, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta reached out to Clayton State, expressing the need to reach and recruit potential mentors, or “Bigs,” in and around the Metro area, but especially in the Clayton County area. Through Clayton State’s PACE (Partnering Academics and Community Engagement) initiative, the connection was made between Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta, and the Introduction to Advertising class, within the Department of Visual and Performing Arts.

In a formal briefing session, the client explained to students enrolled in the class that the reason for this need was that in the communities within Clayton County, the number of “Littles” far exceeded the number of “Bigs” (or mentors). Students received the information brief from the client during an in-person meeting in which the client also explained the communication objectives, including the desire to increase awareness of the need for mentors, and to increase understanding that the mentoring commitment is rewarding, not onerous. In the days following the briefing session, students brainstormed possible tactical approaches to achieving these communication objectives and presented the client with the recommendation of a series of videos featuring “matches,” or pairs of “Bigs” and “Littles,” each providing testimony about the rewarding nature of their mentoring relationship.

Students in the Introduction to Advertising course worked with the client to conceptualize the video series, while simultaneously learning about the processes of pre-production, production, and post-production, including scripting and producing videos that would fulfill the communication objectives. The advertising students came up with a creative approach to the project, and pitched that approach to the client, while learning about and using a video treatment, (brief descriptive paragraphs) and storyboards. After the client approved the creative direction for the video series, students were asked to assess their internal video expertise, training, and capability, and realized that they didn’t possess the skills necessary for completing the technical aspects of the video production, in order to achieve the level of professionalism that the client would likely be seeking. Another aspect of student learning included assessment of human resources, and the decision to outsource production to an external service provider. In this instance, the external service provider included students enrolled in the class, Modes of Video Production.

Ultimately, through collaboration with students of video production, students of advertising wrote audiovisual scripts, learned about the importance of clear communication with clients, and practiced the arts of scriptwriting, pre-production planning, and outsourcing. At the same time, production students learned about receiving and distilling a brief, working with an agency production team, and producing video material that would adhere to the client’s brief. Students worked together, collaborating across disciplines, also learning professional decorum, location production protocol, and the importance of community-engaged learning for both students and community partners.
Outcomes

Ultimately, students produced four videos: “Workshop Fun,” “Monster Trucks and Being a Big Brother,” “Just Dive In,” and “Kyle.” Students presented all four videos to the client, but the video titled “Kyle,” which featured the marketing manager of Big Brothers Big Sisters, quickly became obsolete because of the departure of the main person featured in the video. The remaining three videos are hosted on the YouTube Channel for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta (see https://www.youtube.com/user/BBBSMA2012/videos/). Through this collaborative community engagement project, the community partner gained outreach to its target audiences. In fact, in fall semester 2017, this project work continued as students in Introduction to Public Relations also developed a publicity plan around deployment of the videos in social media, which included building awareness of Big Brothers Big Sisters more deeply into the community. Given the demographics of the surrounding Clayton County area, the project served to build connections among community members at the levels of individual, organizational and institutional relationships. Added to this, students gained professional experience in the areas of scriptwriting, project management, and public relations, including writing news releases, social media strategy, and feature story pitching.

Through this collaboration, Clayton State strengthened its recognition as a community-engaged institution, preparing students both professionally and as civic-minded leaders. The story of this community partnership between Clayton State and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta, and the intent to raise awareness about the need for volunteer mentors, was further disseminated through Clayton State’s print and online magazine, Laker Connection, in spring 2018 (see https://www.clayton.edu/laker-connection/Volume13/Issue1/Spring2018/Brotherly-Love).

Conclusion

The benefits of an engaged learning project like the described collaboration between Clayton State and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta are easy to identify. On graduating, public relations, advertising, and video production students at Clayton State typically enter a competitive job market in which they are considered alongside applicants from larger, more widely recognized institutions like Georgia State University and the University of Georgia. For these students, the ability to present portfolio items that demonstrate real-world application of their learning is valuable. Similarly, students’ ability to describe their experiences using industry terms help potential employers to see that they are workforce-ready.

Perhaps even more important than helping the students become workforce-ready is what might be termed disinterested learning, which takes place during engaged learning experiences like the one described here. In her article, “The University Has No Purpose: And That’s a Good Thing,” Elizabeth Corey describes disinterested learning as learning that takes place without consideration of the activity’s consequences (see https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-University-Has-No-Purpose/243185). In the advertising, public relations, and production courses in which the students were enrolled during the semesters in which they participated in this engaged learning project, the course outcomes predicted that the students would learn best practices in these disciplines. Far more difficult to predict were the outcomes that were related to the human contexts of sympathy, humility, and charity.

For students of a predominantly Black institution like Clayton State, learning increasingly focuses on increasing the student’s income-earning potential upon graduation. Students typically enroll in higher education to achieve the specific and tangible benefits that university education offers. As a result, the less quantifiable benefits of disinterested learning are often overlooked and deemed to be the realm of privileged students, who do not have the sole concern of employability upon graduation (see https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-University-Has-No-Purpose/243185). However, it is the human context of this learning that will help students become more active participants in their own communities and ultimately make them more likely to foster leadership qualities.

By highlighting both the industrial importance as key to career success, as Booker T. Washington asserted, and the importance of the less outcome-focused education, as Du Bois argued, students benefit from broad learning that serves to strengthen their outlook as both employable graduates who are workforce-ready, and as future leaders in the community.

Set against a broader environment in which learning for the sake of learning is increasingly questioned, the success of university courses is often measured based on applicability of coursework to students’ vocational intentions.
Increasingly, instruction is required to take on some measure of applicability to the attainment of professional expertise. Meanwhile, learning that solely fulfills theoretical, epistemological, or civic outcomes may be seen as increasingly difficult to rationalize. The nature of Clayton State’s collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta (2017) serves as an example of the potential of tying professional learning outcomes to civic engagement opportunities, ensuring multifaceted success among the several contextual stakeholders.

References


About the Authors

Susan McFarlane-Alvarez is an associate professor of communication and media studies, while Shandra McDonald is an assistant professor of film in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Clayton State University.
Rural Healthcare and Telehealth: The Importance of Social Work Departments at HBCUs in Developing a Competent Workforce in the Rural South

Dawna D. Nelson and Katina Lang–Lindsey

Abstract

Telehealth is an emerging area of practice within social work that can potentially have great impacts on the way care is provided to rural communities. Rural communities are racially diverse, older, and tend to have lower incomes resulting in unique barriers to already scarce rural healthcare options. In addition to understanding the logistic differences that may influence healthcare receipt in rural areas, such as transportation and cost, there are additional competencies that are required to effectively implement culturally competent telehealth to rural communities, such as understanding digital inequities. Thus, there is a need for a culturally competent social work workforce to engage with rural communities in order to implement effective telehealth practices. HBCUs are primed to create this workforce as evidenced by their historical contributions to the field and current proximity to marginalized communities. This article will explore rurality and healthcare in the Southern United States, provide a general overview of telehealth use by social workers, and discuss the importance of HBCUs in the role of developing a culturally competent workforce to engage diverse communities and enhance telehealth delivery in rural areas.

Rural residents face unique dilemmas related to access and barriers to healthcare. Community level access issues are also commonly conflated by cultural factors related to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Telehealth as a medium for healthcare delivery, particularly in rural areas, has had a major impact on increasing access and reducing barriers to healthcare for traditionally underserved populations in marginalized communities, including those residing in rural areas with limited access to providers (Lambert, Gale, Hansen, Croll, & Hartley, 2013). Similarly, social workers employed as members of multidisciplinary teams in rural settings address a range of environmental and psychosocial barriers to care (Ginsberg, 2011). Yet, social workers’ use of telehealth has been generally neglected in formal training and thus underutilized and examined infrequently (Reamer, 2013). Consideration must be made on how to effectively implement telehealth into education and practice in ways that reach clinicians who primarily service communities that would benefit from telehealth modalities.

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are uniquely positioned to provide access to training opportunities for clinicians who service the aforementioned areas thus socializing professionals who can better engage these marginalized communities. HBCUs have been major contributors to culturally appropriate theory and practice targeted at addressing the unique needs of traditionally underserved populations. Historical events such as The Great Migration (see https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration) charged schools of social work at HBCUs to train and develop social workers who were prepared to address the needs of the era. Similarly, current societal changes such as the evolution of technology and changes in demographic trends will impact social work practice in both current and future generations of professionals (Ginsberg, 2014). Technological advances will have major implications on social workers’ methods of practice, and cultural considerations will need to be addressed in the design and usefulness of these services in order to efficiently engage diverse communities. HBCUs, in alignment with their historical positions, have the potential to uniquely understand, identify, and tailor practice to address cultural considerations in telehealth practice. This article posits that social work programs at HBCUs in the Southern United States are uniquely positioned to contribute to the education and development of telehealth-trained social workers operating as members of multidisciplinary teams and engaging communities to implement competent practice in rural areas.

Rural areas face unique individual and community level barriers to treatment that require effective, culturally appropriate solutions. Telehealth has proven to be an effective solution to the difficulty accessing scarce services in rural areas as well as overcoming barriers and prioritizing receipt of healthcare. Rural residents...
are less likely to have adequate transportation and are disproportionately poorer than those residing in urban areas (Dize, 2019; Meit, Knudson, Gilbert, Tzy-Chyi Yu, Tanenbaum, Ormson, TenBroeck, Bayne, S., Bayne, A., & Popat, 2014). Buzza, Ono, Turvey, Wittrock, Noble, Reddy, Kaboli, and Reisinger (2011) point out that distance and access to care is relative to not only the patients' logistic barriers but also their literal and perceived needs for care. Consequently, patients may prioritize immediate needs such as work and child-rearing responsibilities above healthcare, particularly services that may be considered “non-critical” such as psychoeducation, ongoing therapies, or general follow-up care. This reluctance to allocate already scarce personal resources is conflated with the trend that patients residing in rural areas are more likely to rely on Medicaid as their source of healthcare in areas with known shortage of Medicaid-accepting providers. Even when controlling for poverty and access issues, rural areas continue to show lower healthcare utilization, e.g., screenings (Caldwell, Ford, Wallace, Wang, & Takahashi, 2016). Thus, not surprisingly, there are higher rates of co-morbidity and mortality in these rural areas (Alabama Department of Public Health, 2016).

In this article, we 1) review rural healthcare, 2) provide an overview of the use of telehealth in rural primary care settings by social workers and allied health professionals, and 3) discuss how HBCUs can be at the center of developing qualified clinicians who are prepared to engage communities and enhance delivery to patients in rural areas.

**Background**

**Challenges to Healthcare Delivery in Rural Communities**

Healthcare delivery has consistently been a challenge in rural communities. People there are ordinarily not well served by health agencies and social services despite evidence of attempts to link services since the early 1970s (Bryant, Garnham, Tedmanson, & Diamandi, 2018; Kruse, Bouffard, Doughtery, & Parro, 2016). The problems these patients face come from a range of complex sociodemographic factors that lessen the likelihood needed services are available and may make it more difficult to access and use services when they are available. Rural patients and healthcare providers express numerous barriers linked to the delivery of decent and efficient healthcare services (Cyr, Etchin, Guthrie, & Benneyan, 2019). These barriers include rural resource confines, issues with confidentiality, intersecting roles for patients and providers, travel, and remote difficulties, service entrance limitations, and boundaries in the delivery of adequate education (Brems, Johnson, Warner, & Roberts, 2006). Further, systemic barriers can be connected to patient demographics such as lack of insurance, jobs, chronic illness care, and prenatal care. Barriers can also be related to mezzo and macro level trends such as conflict between the backgrounds of rural healthcare providers and the experiences and cultural norms of rural residents (Sommers, Gujja, Finegold, & Musco, 2015).

Some rural areas still struggle with cultural barriers related to current and historical racism and long-standing discrimination, which has contributed to health disparities. The Black Belt region of Alabama has suffered from major racial and discriminatory barriers dating back to the early 1860s and has inherited the legacy of the plantation culture that left the region in a state of economic depression and underemployment with poor access to social services and mental healthcare.

Formerly sought after for its rich fertile soils, the Black Belt has become a region defined by its dire socioeconomic situation. As depicted in Figure 1, 17 of the poorest counties in Alabama are in the area designated as the Black Belt. In more recent decades, the highlighted areas became known for the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement started by the high population of African American people.
residents in the region. From the plantations of slavery to sharecropping to displaced agricultural workers, economic opportunities have been systematically curtailed for African Americans in the area. This lack of opportunity exists in and contributes to other elements of the opportunity structure such as access to education and health services.

Medically uninsured residents in Alabama are higher than the national averages. According to a report examining uninsurability among low-income adults across the nation, Alabama has the second highest rate of uninsured low-income residents with 36% and 29% of people who reside in rural and urban communities being uninsured, respectively (Hoadley, Alker, & Holmes, 2018). Further, the average per capita income for urban Alabama residents in 2018 was $44,205 with rural per capita income at $35,765. The poverty rate was 20.6% compared to 15.7% in urban areas. In rural Alabama, 19.3% had not completed high school and unemployment was 4.3% compared to 3.8% in urban areas (United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2020).

Rural social service delivery and provisions to healthcare in rural health centers are limited in Alabama and its rural Southern counterparts. Social workers in Federally Qualified Health Centers struggle with resource distribution of care. The lack of social work services in rural areas and their declining accessibility over time is an issue that has been well documented (Bourke, Humphreys, Wakerman, & Taylor, 2012; Bourke, Taylor, Humphreys, & Wakerman, 2013; Dixon & Welch, 2000; Heflin & Miller, 2012; Pong, DesMeules, & Lagacé, 2009). It is currently an expectation that living in rural places is parallel with insufficient healthcare and service provision.

A key challenge for social work is the delivery of appropriate social services and healthcare to rural and remote areas in order to reduce healthcare inequalities (Liaw & Humphreys, 2006). Getting needed services to rural communities means looking at innovative methods of care and delivery of services. Thus, there is a growing body of literature that claims the use of the service renders increased access to care to individuals in these rural locations, which in turn could minimize existing healthcare disparities.

Telehealth

In rural communities telehealth is a useful tool in the delivery of health services through primary care organizations such as Federally Qualified Health Centers. Telehealth is a broad word that describes multiple forms of technology-based interaction between a patient and clinician including live interactive video conferencing, email communication, self-guided web-based interventions, mobile applications, text messages, and many other forms of communication (Reamer, 2013). The ability to access healthcare remotely expands access to care for patients who would have to travel long distances in rural or remote locations in the Black Belt to receive the same care (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015). Options for receiving care via this modality brings increased access to those patients with multiple barriers. Therefore, patients who would otherwise forego utilizing services because of inconvenient and difficult travel circumstance would gain access to care (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015). Additionally, utilizing technologies for appointments that do not require in-person visits can save money for patients and, in some settings, for Medicaid and Medicare when travel is reduced or eliminated (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015).

The vastness of existing telehealth research completed with physicians and allied health professionals supports and describes the effectiveness of the practice in different domains of healthcare (Iacono, Stagg, Pearce, & Hulme Chambers, 2016). Studies show that telehealth can be just as or even more effective than traditional face-to-face behavioral interventions with patients with chronic disease. In a study examining the effectiveness of various treatment modalities for psychotherapy with individuals diagnosed with both depression and Type 2 diabetes, participants using telehealth showed more benefits (i.e., lower symptoms of depression and higher indicators of stability on their diabetic management) compared to the face-to-face sample (Egede, Walker, Payne, Knapp, Acierno, & Frueh, 2018). Comparably, a study evaluating a behavioral intervention for depressed elderly homebound people found that participants receiving the telehealth intervention showed prolonged reductions in their depressive symptoms over the duration of the study period as compared to face-to-face participants (Choi, Marti, Bruce, Hegel, Wilson, & Kunik, 2014). While there is ample research that sufficiently supports the use of telehealth as beneficial, equally important is the acceptability and usefulness of telehealth.

Telehealth has been actively researched to determine both its acceptability and usefulness...
in rural settings. Primary care physicians and allied health professionals have measured the use of telehealth on patient outcomes in multiple ways including patient knowledge, preference, and satisfaction with services. Kruse et al. (2016) explored the association between telehealth and patient satisfaction in a rural location. The authors generated two primary factors related to patient satisfaction; effectiveness, described as improved outcomes and communication, and efficiency relating to decreased travel time, ease of use, and low cost. Studies exploring these factors found that patients receiving care via telehealth in primary care settings identified telehealth as convenient and equitable to quality of care as compared to care as usual, and that it is a preferable method for receiving potentially distressing information (Polinski et al., 2016; Powell, Henstenburg, Cooper, Hollander, & Rising, 2017).

**Special Considerations in the Delivery of Telehealth**

Significant barriers exist at the intersections of rurality and culture, implying barriers to care experienced by rural dwelling patients may vary by the patient’s individual demographics. Thus, cultural considerations are an important factor in telehealth implementation. In a 2015 survey examining psychiatrists’ interest in using telehealth, over one-third of symposium participants expressed a concern that some cultures would be less accepting of the treatment modality (Hilty, Sunderji, Suo, Chan, & McCarron, 2018). Similarly, patients’ age and race may affect how they view the acceptability of using telehealth to address their care needs.

Digital inequality in rural areas may also result in limitations regarding the use of telehealth to provide direct clinical care to patients residing in rural areas (Robinson et al., 2015). Rural areas often lack in reliable, consistent Internet service and patients may be less likely to have access to capable equipment (i.e., camera-enabled computers or laptops). Even though Internet accessibility has improved, access to smartphones, limited data plans and cellphone tower coverage has impeded the ability to effectively implement telehealth with a rural patient (Wodarski & Green, 2015).

**Social Work and Telehealth**

It has long been acknowledged that the complete integration of social workers into rural healthcare as members of the multidisciplinary team can improve care provided to rural-dwelling patients (Badger, Ackerson, Buttell, & Rand, 1997; McGregor, Mercer, & Harris, 2018). In particular, social workers possess a special skill set useful in identifying psychosocial issues that could impact care compliance and thus impact the progression and trajectory of disease. Unfortunately, similar to barriers experienced by other allied healthcare professionals, social workers employed in county and regional health clinics are often limited to the types and intensity of face-to-face interventions they can use to address the areas contributing to these health disparities on a group and/or individual level. Telehealth services may be an effective means for increasing access, reducing overall costs of healthcare delivery including management of disease in non-acute settings, and increasing the quality of care delivered. However, special considerations must be made when considering how social workers effectively implement and assess telehealth in order to ensure it is in alignment with the professional standards of care and ethical guidelines (Reamer, 2019).

In 2017, the four major governing social work bodies worked together to create a guiding document for the use of technology in social work practice. Yet, there continues to be a shortage of formal research and training to prepare clinicians for the use of telehealth in social work direct practice. The document outlines standards relating to the design and delivery of services; gathering, managing, and storing information; and using technology to provide supervision and continued education to social workers. Social work ethical standards of practice as well as the document guiding the use of technology in practice require that the profession continue to advocate for the use of, and simultaneously examine the appropriateness and efficacy of, telehealth on patient satisfaction and outcomes as technology continues to evolve. In general, there is a paucity of research examining client attitudes and opinions, outcomes, and implementation processes for allied health professionals use of telehealth (Iacono et al., 2016).

It is important for social workers to be producers of knowledge relating to the use of telehealth in practice in order to contribute to service delivery, efficacy, and policy development to improve the lives of patients residing in rural areas. Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, and Pascal (2014) argue that social work has historically had difficulty incorporating technological advances and posit that “social work professionals need to begin a dialogue with IT developers, social service managers, and funding bodies (pg. 467)” to enhance the use of technology and adapt clinical
areas that continue to have a shortage of services. and solutions relating to increased access to care in a unique position to contribute to the discussion (e.g., the Affordable Care Act of 2014), HBCUs sit relating to the insurability of many rural residents with the recent changes in the political climate of scholars using their knowledge to act as activists.

Historically, HBCUs have consistently been at the forefront of tackling social justice issues in American culture (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Shorette & Palmer, 2015). From their active participation in the fights for their organization and rights as students at the institutions, to participation in the civil rights movement, the institutions continue to nurture students who challenge various forms of systemic oppression including access to resources, for example, Internet accessibility (John & Stage, 2014). HBCUs as an entity are additionally uniquely positioned to advocate for policy that enhances the strengths of existing community resources when implementing telehealth (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransomis, T., & Bowman, 2010).

Additionally, the graduates produced at HBCUs show more social mobility, especially when accounting for factors related to precollege success, indicating that socially disadvantaged communities including rural areas with lack of economic, health, and education opportunity gain collectively from HBCU graduates. First, research identifies that HBCUs have higher retention and graduation rates among students who originate from lower socioeconomic status families (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). The authors point out that though historic research identified low graduation and retention rates at HBCUs as

HBCUs’ Role in Social Work and Telehealth

There is a long-standing history with HBCUs creating and molding a diverse staff of social workers. This history dates back to the great migration of African Americans from areas in the South to urban Northern cities (Martin & Martin, 1995). As the demographic make-up and physical residency of the U.S. population evolves, HBCUs continue to create a culturally competent professional healthcare workforce that contributes to diverse communities, both urban and rural (Noonan, Lindong, & Jaitley, 2013). Accordingly, a 2004 study found a relationship between rural African American communities’ proximity to an HBCU, educational attainment among African American rural residents, and economic growth in the community (Mykerezi & Mills, 2004). Thus, is it beyond likely the social workers created at HBCUs are overwhelmingly uniquely positioned to engage diverse, rural areas in which these schools and their student body originated and continue to dwell.

Historically HBCUs were significant in, amongst other things, contributing a workforce prepared to manage the overwhelming task of providing interventions to a new class of African American urbanites at the height of African American migration to Northern cities. The early social workers created at HBCU institutions contributed to new ways of understanding diversity and strengths in the social work profession. Dominated by deficit-based models, early social work programs at HBCU institutions were infused with theory and models of practice that had been developed and normed to serve white welfare recipients (Martin & Martin, 1995). However, given the opportunity, HBCUs forged the capacity to produce and direct knowledge acquisition to contribute to evidence-based practice for enhanced services in a culturally sensitive time, including a changing technological and political landscape. Bowles et al. (2016) point out that HBCUs have historically been “bridges to…social reform in American society.” They continue by describing how initial contributors to the social work field such as Dubois and Frazier stressed the importance of scholars using their knowledge to act as activists. With the recent changes in the political climate relating to the insurability of many rural residents (e.g., the Affordable Care Act of 2014), HBCUs sit in a unique position to contribute to the discussion and solutions relating to increased access to care in areas that continue to have a shortage of services.

The changing demographics of the Southern U.S. population warrant a shift in how we conceptualize and integrate cultural competence into standards of practice. In the early 1900s, nearly 90% of African Americans resided in the South. Though the Great Migration saw a shift in the concentration of African Americans, they have consistently had a higher concentration in the South, with 55% of the population currently living in the Southern region. In recent decades, the African Americans in the South grew more than in other geographic areas, with an 18% increase across the population (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011). Similarly, the aging population, those most likely to have significant medical needs in rural primary care settings, has also shown to be disproportionately concentrated in rural areas in the Southern region with nearly half (46.9%) of America’s rural older adults living in the Southern region between 2012 and 2016 (Smith & Trevelyan, 2018). These minority populations, combined with the aforementioned sociodemographic factors known to impact access and barriers to care, would benefit from a diverse workforce adequately trained in both social justice issues and advancements in practice (i.e., telehealth).

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compared to primarily white institutions, prior research often neglected to consider how variance in pre-college preparation and educational programs differ in communities that are primarily lower socioeconomic status. When considering the household income of incoming freshmen, HBCUs produce a higher graduation rate for students with low-income backgrounds (Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017). HBCUs foster growth of a complex workforce, inclusive of students who may come from difficult environments and enter with educational deficits. Thus, it is likely that students coming from the rural Black Belt counties of Alabama are more likely to successfully complete degrees at an HBCU.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research and Curriculum Development

Though social workers’ use of technology to enhance patient-provider interactions and patient outcomes has evolved immensely in the last 20 years, it remains underdeveloped and is infrequently implemented. Further, social work is only beginning to explore theory, policy, and practices as they relate to telehealth delivery. Social workers’ use of telehealth to decrease known health disparities and improve healthcare outcomes among rural-dwelling patients is a special consideration in this exploration. Smyth (in Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth, & Bogo, 2016) notes that digital literacy in itself is a form of cultural competence and that neglecting to incorporate technology in social work education precludes an instance where social workers are willingly culturally incompetent. As such, it is of paramount importance that African American social workers, along with other groups of color, receive the necessary training so that a sufficient pool of culturally aware and knowledgeable social workers are available to engage diverse communities. In this regard, HBCUs have a unique and important role to ensure that African American social workers are trained and equipped to practice in a culturally competent manner. In conclusion, it is essential that social workers are trained to expand the delivery of services to marginalized communities. In turn marginalized communities benefit from professionals versed in culturally competent engagement strategies.

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