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Diversity of Engagement Scholarship Demonstrated

Once again I welcome the opportunity to share with you some of the most impressive engagement scholarship research around. Whether a community partner, student, or university representative, there is something in this issue of JCES that will resonate with you. I guarantee it. Review of the manuscripts in this issue caused me to pause and reflect on the array of social issues with which we as a society are presented and their relationships to engagement scholarship. While I am still reflecting on this, and will for a while, I did conclude that one of the primary benefits for me of being involved in engagement scholarship is that the work fulfills so many aspects of my life. The connections that are easy to see are how engagement scholarship connects with me in my professional, academic, and scholarly roles. What might not be as apparent to some is how engagement scholarship helps me fulfill that humanitarian part of me that has a responsibility to contribute to society in a positive way. I find that most people would like to have their lives matter. Most people would like to know that their having lived somehow made a difference in the world. Engagement scholarship provides one mechanism through which that can be done. Engagement scholarship has the potential to change lives for the better, improve quality of life, have unheard voices heard, and yes, possibly change the world, no matter how small. Despite its relatively new position in the research arena, engagement scholarship is well positioned to do these things.

The current issue of JCES is reflective of these possibilities. This issue has diversity in a variety of ways, including methodology, thought, purpose, participants, and geography to name a few. One longitudinal, qualitative study examines community-university relationships developed through, relationship education, while another addresses community-university partnerships within the context of a survey study and recognition of the inter-professional nature of such collaborations. From the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua to South Alaska and throughout the United States, this issue confirms that JCES recognizes the importance of community engagement within an international context. Also included in this issue are manuscripts that examine innovative ways for addressing community health through engagement scholarship.

One project reports on the use of spoken word, a form of performance poetry, to address HIV/AIDS and another discusses the use of “girl power” photovoice to address relevant health in communities. Several of the manuscripts focus on lessons learned, providing valuable insight on diverse aspects of engagement scholarship. Recognizing the importance of service learning to engagement scholarship, we include several manuscripts reporting on service learning efforts. I would also like to highlight that many of the manuscripts in this issue appropriately give particular attention to the cultural aspects of relevant communities and community partners. Given the importance of community partners to engagement scholarship, cultural (widely defined) nuances must be given attention to across all levels of the process, ideally from inception to dissemination, when possible. I was especially pleased to see this attention to culture highlighted in many of the manuscripts in this issue, along with the elevation of the role and levels of involvement of community partners.

As always, we look forward to receiving your feedback. What you have to say is important and will be valuable to JCES going forward. Please feel free to contact me at jces@ua.edu.
Sustaining University-Community Partnerships in Providing Relationship Education: A Longitudinal Qualitative Case Study

J. Mitchell Vaterlaus, Linda Skogrand, Kay Bradford, and Brian J. Higginbotham

Abstract

Relationship education (RE) has gained much public attention as classes have been implemented through state relationship initiatives. Developing university-community partnerships in implementing RE has been thought to increase access to underserved populations and increase awareness of healthy relationships in a community. Evaluation of these partnerships is just beginning. This three year longitudinal qualitative study represents five Cooperative Extension faculty members’ experiences with university-community partnerships in providing RE on a county level. Faculty members described their experiences identifying partners and outcomes from establishing partnerships and forming and sustaining partnerships. Results are discussed in terms of interdisciplinary university-community partnership literature and implications.

Healthy romantic relationships have been associated with positive outcomes for adults, their children, and for the larger community (Adler-Baeder, Shirer, & Bradford, 2007). Many couples who have had relationship problems do not seek professional assistance from marital therapists (Larson, 2004). However, Relationship education (RE) has been identified primarily as a preventive intervention that helps to improve relationships and reaches a broader audience (Larson, 2004). RE represents a broad category of programs that vary in dosage including one-time events, skill-based programming, and series of classes (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004).

RE has gained public attention due to the unprecedented amount of funds that have been allocated for the promotion of healthy relationships in the United States (Brotherson & Duncan, 2004). A primary focus of these funds has been to provide RE for underserved populations (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Reaching diverse and low-income audiences requires educators to use more creative approaches for participant recruitment (Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Bradford, & Higginbotham, 2012). Developing meaningful university-community partnerships with organizations that already provide services for these populations create opportunities for collaborating agencies to refer clients to RE programs or provide relationship educators with an existing audience (Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Vaterlaus et al., 2012). The current study will add to existing literature by examining how Cooperative Extension faculty members have developed university-community collaborations in providing RE over time to low-income participants as part of a statewide healthy relationship initiative.

Hawkins and colleagues (2004) concluded that promoting healthy relationships should be a community-wide effort. When relationship educators build university-community partnerships with agencies and organizations within different sectors of the community, there is increased support for establishing and sustaining healthy relationships. Futris (2007) indicated that community collaboration is essential in providing high quality RE programs. His suggestions for identifying community partners included considering the skills and resources needed, recognizing organizations that have these skills and resources, and ensuring that there is a representation of the various services available for relationships in the community. Futris (2007) and The Lewin Group (2003) suggested that once they are formed, community partnerships are maintained through establishing structure (leadership), goals (including plans for these goals), and ongoing evaluation of the collaboration.

Few evaluative studies have been published specifically related to university-community partnerships (also known as collaborations) regarding the implementation of RE. Evaluation of collaborations can include identifying process, impacts, and outcomes (Futris, 2007). Evaluating the process of the collaboration involves recognizing the quality of the relationships, the roles and levels of involvement of the parties of the membership, and sustainability of the collaboration. Evaluating the outcome of the collaboration also requires identification of the results of the collaboration (e.g., the number of people served, the provision of the RE course itself), whereas the evaluation of impact focuses more on the influence of the collaboration on the larger environment (e.g., decreased rates of domestic violence; Futris, 2007).
One study used an ethnographic case study approach to identify how people (n = 9) from university-community partnerships managed challenges in collaboration within a regional healthy relationship initiative (Carlton, Whiting, Bradford, Dyk, & Vail, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were used to identify challenges and successes in the initiative’s collaborations. From these interviews, researchers identified four points that are key to collaboration — (a) people: participants commonly mentioned that it was the people in the university-community partnerships that made the program work; (b) relationships: the strength and duration of the relationships depend on the purpose of the relationship; (c) vision: common goals of the university-community partnership; and (d) structure: the operationalization of the goals and vision of the program. Carlton and colleagues (2009) also found that each of these factors were further influenced by elements in the collaboration’s process like communication, conflict resolution, and flexibility.

Purpose of the Current Study

Providing RE at a community level is a way to improve not only couple relationships, but the lives of children and the larger community (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007). University-community partnerships are thought to increase access to underserved populations (Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Vaterlaus et al., 2012) and community support of healthy relationships (Hawkins et al., 2004). The listed benefits have promoted the establishment of collaborations and now evaluative research on university-community collaborations is emerging (Carlton et al., 2009). The current study is a longitudinal qualitative process and outcome evaluation of collaborations between RE educators in a statewide healthy relationship initiative and organizations within their community. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed for understanding of the development, structure, and maintenance of these collaborations over time.

Method

Healthy Relationship Initiative

The current project is part of a statewide Healthy Relationship Initiative (HRI). County Cooperative Extension faculty members, also referred to as Extension agents in some states, applied for funding from the initiative by proposing RE activities designed to meet their individual county needs. To obtain funding, Extension faculty proposals were required to provide services for low-income couples and identify partnerships in the community to assist in program implementation and sustainability. In 2009-2010, 14 county Extension faculty members implemented RE activities throughout a western state. Between the years of 2010-2011 the number of faculty members implementing RE increased to 19, and in 2011-2012 the number grew to 21. The RE activities included one-time events (e.g., experiential date nights, lectures from relational experts) and more formal series of RE classes. Evaluations of the larger HRI have detailed the specific outcomes (Bradford, Higginbotham, & Skogrand, 2014), the successes and challenges of providing RE (Bradford, Huffaker, Stewart, Skogrand, & Higginbotham, 2014), risk of intimate partner violence in RE (Bradford, Skogrand, & Higginbotham, 2011), and providing RE for diverse and low-income populations (Vaterlaus et al., 2012). The current study focuses on evaluating the university-community partnerships in RE implementation.

Sample

At the conclusion of first year of the grant, five Extension faculty members who were actively forming university-community partnerships and reporting on their experiences in grant-related reports/interviews were identified. The five faculty members were invited to participate in the optional longitudinal study through email, and there would be no penalty for declining. All five faculty members elected to participate. The faculty members in the final sample were all female, married, and had earned master’s degrees. The faculty members lived and worked in rural (n = 3) and urban (n = 2) counties.

Pseudonyms were given to each of the participating county Extension faculty members to protect confidentiality. To provide some context for each of the faculty members’ counties, ethnicity and poverty levels are provided (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, www.census.gov/2010census/). Laura lived and worked in a predominantly rural county with about 28% of the population living in poverty. Laura’s county also included an American Indian reservation and American Indian residents represented nearly half of the population in her county. Cathy and Melinda also lived and worked in rural counties. Both counties were predominantly Caucasian and approximately 10 percent of their populations were living at or below the poverty level.

In contrast, Alisa and Natalie lived and worked in urban counties. Alisa’s county population included 10 percent of people who identified as Latino/Hispanic descent and approximately 11% were identified as living in poverty. Natalie’s county similarly had 11% poverty rate in her county, and more the 16% of the residents identified as Latino/Hispanic.
**Data Collection**

The five Extension faculty members completed three proposals, 12 quarterly reports, one interview, and one emailed questionnaire during the three years of the HRI. IRB permission was granted for the study. Faculty members each completed a demographic form. Table 1 shows the different data sources used in this longitudinal study by grant year.

**Grant proposals.** Faculty members had the opportunity to apply for funding various RE activities through grant proposals each year of the grant. Grant proposals were used in this study to identify how faculty members changed/maintained their community partnerships over the three years of the grant. This was done because the proposals required faculty members to specifically identify the community partners that they would use and/or form to make their RE programs successful, in addition to other information such as proposed RE activities, budget, and number of people to be served.

**Quarterly progress reports.** As part of the grant requirements, faculty members completed quarterly activity reports that were submitted to grant administrators. These reports included specific information concerning progress, successes, and challenges experienced in implementing the RE activities, as well as university-community partnerships. These reports were submitted via email or fax to grant administrators.

**Semi-structured interviews.** At the conclusion of the first year of the grant in 2010 faculty members were invited to participate in interviews. One of the co-investigators and/or one research assistant conducted the interviews in person. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and asked about a variety of topics, but allowed faculty members flexibility to talk about topics that they identified as important. Faculty members were asked about their partnerships and also discussed them throughout the interview process. The interviews usually lasted 25–30 minutes for each faculty member. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed.

**Emailed questionnaires.** In 2012, the five selected Extension faculty members were invited to complete an online questionnaire. Questionnaires were personalized for each faculty member and included four of their own respective statements about university-community partnerships from their quarterly reports or transcribed interviews from the first year of the grant. Faculty members’ previous statements were highlighted in red and open space which asked faculty members to “Please re-read your past statement and under each statement write about how your ideas/thoughts about building and maintaining partnerships have stayed the same or evolved.”

**Design and Data Analyses**

A longitudinal qualitative case study approach was selected to “capture through long-term immersion” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 16) Extension faculty members’ experiences of working with community partners and to identify any changes of their perceptions of these collaborations over time. There is not a prescribed way for conducting a longitudinal qualitative case study; however, it is recommended that data be collected prior, during, and after the participant’s experience (Saldaña, 2003) and this recommendation was used in this study (see Table 1). Following data collection, all data were compiled into individual datasets for each participant. Information concerning university-community partnerships was identified and separated into a separate data set for each faculty member in time-order—organizing the experiences from beginning, middle, to end (Saldaña, 2003).

The time-ordered data sets were read and re-read several times for each faculty member individually. Each data set was used to construct an individual case study for each of the five Extension faculty members. Case studies were constructed in time order—listing experiences from beginning, middle, and to the present. This meant that information from all data sources was used throughout each case study.

Following the construction of individual case studies representing each Extension faculty member’s experience, themes were identified. Each of the case studies were read and re-read by one researcher, specifically focusing on how experiences evolved or remained similar over time. Four themes emerged and a second researcher validated the themes. When disagreements emerged, the two researchers consult-
ed the data and case studies to ensure the themes were consistent with the faculty members’ shared experience. A new data file was created by taking information from each of the case studies and categorizing the information by themes. This data file was used to construct the results section.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the accuracy of the data in this evaluation of collaborations, triangulation and member checking were implemented (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011). Triangulation was implemented using multiple data sources and methods of data collection (e.g., emailed questionnaire, multiple interviewers, written reports). Also, to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, a variation of member checking was used (Cho & Trent, 2006). First, portions of the data from the first year of the grant were sent to each faculty member in the emailed questionnaire. Faculty members were asked to check their transcribed responses. Additionally, after case studies were complete they were sent to each faculty member who were then asked four structured questions to identify the accuracy of the presentation of their experiences. Minor suggestions and changes were implemented into the case studies.

**Results**

The results are derived from the five case studies. First, the themes identified across the case studies are presented. Following the presentation of the themes, two of the case studies were selected to provide the reader with a relatively richer, more in-depth understanding of benefits and challenges of partnerships for two of the five participants. After reading and re-reading the longitudinal case studies, four major themes emerged: (a) faculty members commonly described their process of identifying organizations in their community with whom they could partner—typically beginning with a broad perspective of potential partners and then narrowed partnership options based on faculty members’ specific RE goals; (b) forming community partnerships was discussed in terms of reciprocity of needs between the faculty members and the partnering organization, pre-existing relationships, experience, and challenges; (c) faculty members discussed their methods of sustaining their university-community partnerships as well as the challenges of sustaining these relationships; (d) finally, faculty members discussed the positive outcomes from forming community partnerships. All five faculty members’ experiences were represented in each of the themes.

**Identifying Potential University-Community Partners**

When the Extension faculty members submitted their first grant proposals, they used a shotgun approach in identifying university-community partnerships. Each faculty member listed several potential partnerships on their grant applications, but many of the listed partnerships were never mentioned again or developed over the three years of providing RE. As faculty members began to plan their specific RE activities, they began to identify the needs they had and started to look for partnerships that could meet these needs. Some were identified in the grant proposal, others were newly identified community partners. Faculty members were not just interested in general audiences, but had specific goals for reaching “target audiences.” Natalie and Melinda wanted to provide RE for adolescents, and both identified local school districts or high schools with which they could partner. Alisa and Laura intended on providing RE for minority populations and both considered organizations or agencies that could increase their access to these populations. Over time, faculty members were more specific in the grant proposals, even interweaving their community partners’ roles in their RE activity proposals for the following two grant years.

Common attributes faculty members looked for in partnerships included “existing audiences” and “already-existing” organizations. All five faculty members talked about the importance of having an existing audience and the faculty continued to recognize the value of this over time. Natalie explained, “Partnerships continue to be the ideal way to find participants for classes.” Forming university-community partnerships with existing organizations was valued because of existing structures and, in some instances, the existing relationship between the faculty member and organization. For example, Alisa identified a partnership to reach Latino residents she had made prior to providing RE in her county. She stated, “This group is an already-existing advisory council formed … in 2008 to assist and advise the Latino finance classes in [the county].” Many of these existing organizations identified by the faculty members were local churches, which had access to and rapport with the targeted audience.

**Forming University-Community Partnerships**

After faculty members identified the community partnerships they sent letters, provided presentations, planned a dinner meeting, and met with these desired collaborators. Faculty members identified common goals that could be accomplished between the university-community partnerships. Cathy ex-
plained that she had an existing marriage coalition in her county with representation from many organizations (e.g., religious, mental health). Their original purpose was to strengthen marriage through a one-time event held in the county. Cathy’s leadership of the marriage coalition has increased the coalition’s efforts to strengthen marriage. The coalition has now grown to include planning, advertising, and teaching a variety of RE in the county. Cathy explained, “[The coalition] probably only meets about four times a year. They are very good to come and help with our marriage celebration and I’ve got four of them that teach [RE] classes for me now.”

Faculty members also used pre-existing experience working with target audiences as a way to form university-community partnerships. Laura decided that she wanted to provide RE for American Indian people in her community. Prior to providing RE for American Indians, Laura implemented a research study with American Indian participants. She explained:

> It’s absolutely essential to have Native partners if you’re doing a Native program. And it’s essential to have them involved in the planning of the whole thing. And that’s why I feel like the planning for this program was our research study because we had their Native partners who helped us all through the program.

Laura not only used existing partners to provide RE, but also implemented the skills she learned from her previous research experience with American Indians to form new university-community partnerships. Faculty members also considered the people who would be the best contact to form their university-community partnerships. For example, Melinda wanted to increase healthy relationships for adolescents in her county. Melinda identified student body officers at a local high school and their advisor. In her first quarterly report she wrote:

> [I] met with [high school] student body officers and their advisor to provide incentive funds and brainstormed activity ideas to promote and provide healthy dating and relationship education with supplemental curriculum for the entire student body of 617, plus administration, teachers, coaches, advisors, counselors, and staff assistants.

Through the relationships with the student body officers and their advisor, Melinda was able to reach the students in the school. This university-community partnership met Melinda’s need to provide RE and the student body officers’ need to provide activities and leadership for their peers.

Faculty members did not ignore the challenges that arose in the process of forming community partnerships. Melinda reported that partnership formation was a time consuming process, “Networking and brainstorming sessions have taken a tremendous amount of time and effort, but will hopefully pay off in the long run. Local buy-in [for the RE activities] is extremely critical for successful programming at the community level.” Melinda specifically spoke about the challenges of “matching ideas of local agencies” and “maintaining the integrity and value of local support.”

Natalie also partnered with the schools to offer RE. There were some frustrations getting the RE curriculum approved by the school district. When Natalie reflected back on this experience, she said:

> I have realized at the [local] school level that they get rather frustrated with the district level because they get the run around like I did and so often times teachers do whatever they want. Since I did go to the district level and ask permission initially, I have made an effort to respect the district level wishes—but it can be challenging when I have a teacher asking me to do the opposite.

Natalie was able to reach hundreds of adolescents through the university-community partnership with schools in her community.

**Sustaining University-Community Partnerships**

Over the course of three years, the Extension faculty members talked about the evolution, maintenance, and dissolution of community partnerships. All of the faculty members utilized the old saying, “If it’s not broke don’t fix it” with at least one of their university-community partners. Alisa continued to hold dinner meetings annually to maintain her relationship with the Latino Advisory Council (LAC) in her county. Melinda continued her relationship with the student body officers through their advisor at the school. Most talked about “making contact,” “sending emails,” and “attending meetings” as ways to maintain their community partnerships.

Cathy reported that the county marriage coalition, which included multiple partners, changed and evolved over time. Cathy indicated that the marriage coalition had become self-sustaining in membership...
recruitment because of the word-of-mouth referrals that came from the university-community partnership. Cathy reflected on her three years of partnering with the marriage coalition:

Our coalition has remained strong. Most of the members are still on the coalition. Some changed. I have not had to recruit new ones, because they come to me when they hear about us. … We have a great community support from private practice, schools, service organizations, church groups, etc. Four of our marriage education classes are taught by coalition members using the curriculum they helped design.

Not all of the partnerships originally established by faculty members were sustained over the three years of the grant. Challenges in sustaining university-community partnerships related to changes in the actual organization with which the faculty members partnered or challenges in the structure (e.g., leadership) of the partnership. Laura explained that needs and structures of some of her established partnerships changed, which made it difficult to maintain the relationship. Natalie talked about a partnership she formed with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to provide RE for their employees. The partnership was successful during the first year and because of the popularity of the RE classes Natalie was invited to additional sites. Following completion of the first year, Natalie’s original contact person was no longer working at the IRS and no courses were offered with this partnership in the second year. However, someone at the IRS had her name and contacted her a year later to provide RE.

Outcomes of Forming University-Community Partnerships

Throughout the three years of the project, county Extension faculty members continued to evaluate the benefits of forming community partnerships. They used words like “essential” and “helpful” to describe the role of university-community partnerships in providing RE. Faculty members specifically talked about outcomes in terms of participant recruitment, program implementation, and creation of new RE opportunities.

Participant recruitment. As stated previously, one of the major reasons faculty members sought to develop partnerships was to gain access to an existing audience. In some instances the partnership itself provided the audience and in others they became essential for advertising. Natalie acknowledged the importance of community partnerships in terms of recruitment for RE. She stated, “Partners often provide a set audience for presentations or at least can help to get the word out about classes and encourage participants to attend. It would be challenging to hold classes successfully without partnerships.”

Alisa explained the importance of her partnership in providing culturally appropriate advertising materials and existing trust between LAC members and the Latino residents in her county. Melinda worked closely with the student body officers at a high school to provide relationship education for adolescents and she also worked with the Local Interagency Council (LIC), which is similar to a marriage coalition, to provide RE for adult couples in her county. Melinda rallied her university-community partners to disseminate information about her programs. Melinda explained:

Flyers were prepared and shared with LIC participants to distribute around the communities, and to their co-workers, clientele, friends and neighbors. … Flyers were also presented to and shared with [high school] student body officers and their advisor to disseminate information to entire student body, administration, counselors, teachers, coaches, and staff assistants.

Program implementation. Over the three years, faculty members commonly talked about the importance of partnerships in implementing programs. They agreed that their partnerships provided culturally appropriate recommendations for curriculum and advertising, instructors, and locations for holding RE classes. Cathy specifically talked about the increased buy-in by the marriage coalition she partnered with over time. She explained that she collaboratively developed a marriage curriculum with people on the coalition and now members from the coalition are teaching the curriculum in the county.

Alisa described her partnership with the LAC as important for ensuring cultural sensitivity. Alisa presented her RE curriculum for the council’s review and their recommendations were implemented. Alisa also had members of the council serve as instructors at her RE events. This process was similar for Laura who worked closely with the American Indian population. Laura partnered with an organization that exclusively served American Indians in her county and through this partnership identified an American Indian who was qualified to provide her culturally sensitive RE curriculum. Laura said:
Our success I attribute 100 percent to the fact that this is, first of all, sanctioned by [American Indian Partnership] so they allow their employees to participate. And number two that they authorized [their qualified employee] to be the one to deliver the program.

Creation of new relationship education opportunities. One of the major benefits from forming community partnerships captured in a longitudinal perspective was that new RE opportunities emerged from established partnerships. Melinda talked about how her partnership with the LIC opened opportunities to provide RE for three additional organizations. Natalie explained that her partnerships with teachers provided new opportunities for providing RE every year. She said, “Because teachers generally have new students yearly, I have created some long lasting partnerships where they plan on including me each year as part of their coursework.”

All of the faculty members described how partnerships helped them increase their RE opportunities. They also, however, recognized how their established partners learned the value of RE and began to look for their own opportunities to increase RE in their counties. For example, Melinda said this about the student body officers with which she partnered:

The high school and the student body officers have come a long way, and over time have become so invested in the value of healthy relationships, they looked this year for ways to incorporate RE programming and efforts throughout the entire school year, in addition to the entire month of February.

Case Studies
Two case studies are presented to provide an in-depth understanding of the identification, formation, maintenance, and outcomes of community partnerships over time. Laura’s experience included the dissolution of some of her most promising community partnerships, which provided a perspective of some of the specific challenges in maintaining community partnerships. In contrast, Alisa’s experience included working with the same community partnership over the three-year period. Together, the case studies highlight both positive and challenging aspects of the themes previously identified from the five Extension faculty members.

Case Study: Laura
In her first proposal, Laura said she would work with members of an American Indian Tribe, the tribal health care organization, the local Domestic Violence Coalition (DVC), the school district, the county’s council on aging, a fine arts organization, a women’s health resource team, the local university, and the Office of Rehabilitation. Laura received funding to provide marriage education for the American Indian population and RE for adolescents and young adults.

In Laura’s second quarterly report she stated, “I called the director of [a local health system serving the tribe] to propose a collaboration.” Her intention was to use their building and provide education for the employees. She also indicated that she attended the American Indian tribal meeting in her county. Laura also stated that she held a luncheon for the DVC to educate them on the progress of providing RE on the reservation and to solicit their recommendations on how to make this program successful.

It took more time than expected to build the university-community partnership with the health system. However, the wait was worth it and the chief executive officer agreed to collaborate and offer these classes to her employees. The health system even offered to have one of their employees who specializes in behavioral health and American Indian culture teach the RE classes. In her final quarterly report in 2010, Laura wrote, “Our greatest success was forming strong working partnerships with two significant organizations within two [tribal] communities. These collaborations provided not only cultural insights, but also opportunities to reach participants from the [American Indian community].” One frustration Laura explained was that the leaders of these organizations never attended the RE classes, so they really did not get to see the value of the program.

Laura’s second proposal again included RE activities for tribal members and young adults. Laura experienced some challenges with resuming collaborations formed during the first year of the grant. She explained:

Last year, we had an outstanding partnership with [the tribal health system] to deliver marriage classes on the reservation. However, after meeting with their representatives earlier this month, I learned that they are no longer interested in having marriage classes offered through their clinics. So, I am searching for a new partnership and a new venue for delivering our Strong [American Indian] Marriages/Strong Relationships—Strong Lives curriculum.
Laura was disappointed, but also did not give up on the university-community partnership. She stated, “I have not given up on this partner, and will look for another possible format for presenting marriage activities so that we can salvage this partnership.” Despite the setback Laura formed a new collaboration with the director of student life at the local university to provide RE for young adults and she continued with the support of the DVC.

As the second grant year continued, success with the partnership increased and several young adults participated in RE activities. In her third quarterly report Laura wrote, “I regret not being able to identify [tribal] partners and venues on the reservation.” However, in the end she found a different organization within the American Indian community to partner with, and she was able to provide RE.

In Laura’s 2011–2012 proposal for providing RE, she proposed three activities that were not specific to the American Indian population in her county. She partnered with the DVC, the local university, and added the largest local high school in the county. In her first quarterly report of the grant year, Laura stated:

Coalition members feel dating violence prevention is badly needed in our high schools. I explained that this year’s grant allows for healthy relationship classes to be provided at the county’s largest high school. The coalition wants to be involved and will help get healthy relationship classes into other high schools.

Laura and the DVC attempted to get the RE curriculum approved for implementation in the high school. The high school rejected the proposal because the curriculum included sensitive information. Laura felt support from the DVC during this time. She wrote, “I reported this barrier at our last DVC meeting and members expressed their surprise and support of the program.” A brainstorming session ensued and new ideas for getting the program into the high schools were devised collaboratively. Despite Laura and the DVC’s best efforts, the high school did not approve the RE offering. Laura indicated disappointment with this outcome, but she also stated that she felt support from the DVC and she continued to be committed to finding a partnership that would allow her to provide RE for adolescents in her county.

Case Study: Alisa

When considering providing RE for couples in her county, Alisa considered pre-existing university-community partnerships and several new ones. Alisa proposed including RE programming into the work of a pre-existing LAC in her county:

Members of this council are either leaders and well-known among the Latino community or are actual Latino members of the community. Because of the diverse and, yet, cohesive nature of this group and the work with low-income audiences, in addition to being members of the Latino community, we believe that they will be perfect to serve as the advisory council for the entire RE project in our [county].

The LAC included prominent local church leaders, educators or liaisons with schools, members from other community programs for Latinos, and people from government funded programs (e.g., Head Start). To begin to gain council support for RE in the community, Alisa planned a dinner meeting. She wrote in her first quarterly report, “We sent nearly 100 letters to current and potential LAC members notifying them of our dinner meeting in January, 2010. We also requested help in finding a location for the series.”

Alisa found some immediate successes from her partnership with finding a location for her event. She wrote, “[Four members of our advisory council] offered to let us use their buildings for the series. After touring these sites, we chose [the final site] because of its location and setup for the workshops, child care, and dinner.” However, Alisa was originally disappointed with her response rate for her dinner meeting. She stated, “Our response to attending the LAC meeting has not been as successful as we had hoped. Only about 20 members of this council have made reservations to attend this meeting.”

When Alisa did meet with the advisory council, she acknowledged in her quarterly report that they were supportive in identifying the cultural sensitivity of the curriculum and identifying respected people from the Latino community to provide the RE. Alisa also reported the usefulness of the advisory council for advertising her events with flyers, on the radio and through word of mouth. Alisa explained, “We are relying heavily on our advisory council to assist with helping us get the word out to members of the Latino community.” When the actual RE was implemented, the advisory council followed through. Alisa reported, “Workshops were held in April and May. They were taught by members of our LAC and our … Extension intern.”
As Alisa reflected on her first year providing RE in partnership with the LAC, she focused on the members/organizations on the council who were most helpful. She stated that the local church partners on the council were especially helpful in the advertising for RE to the Latino community. Alisa also indicated that through her council’s partnership she was invited to hold future RE in the local building that houses a variety services for Latinos families in the community. When asked if there were partnerships she would not use in the future, Alisa replied, “I don’t think so.”

During Alisa’s second year of providing RE in her county she, again, stated that she would partner with her LAC. In her proposal she stated that she wanted to increase her council membership utilizing more representation from organizations at the local university. Alisa also stated that members of her council contacted her about the classes this year. Representatives from the organization that invited them to hold the RE classes contacted her in July. Alisa said, “We were delighted to be invited to this beautiful facility!” Through this more specific partnership Alisa and her team had more access to Latino migrant farm workers.

Alisa held a dinner meeting in September, 2010 with her LAC. She took the opportunity to evaluate the program from the year before with the members and identify ways to improve the classes to be held in the Spring of 2011. She explained in a quarterly report:

… we met with our Latino Advisory Council to critique the Latino program from last spring and to discuss changes we might want to make to the upcoming series. They also helped us fine-tune our advertising. Many members of the Advisory Council took copies of the flyer to share with the members of the Latino community with whom they work.

Alisa reported strong turnouts to her Latino RE courses in the second year. She said, “The Latino relationship classes were very successful. To be able to reach an average of 80 adults and children who are members of the Latino community is a satisfying accomplishment.” The partnerships continued to prove positive for future RE opportunities. The two organizations that provided the facilities for RE in 2010 and 2011 both invited Alisa to hold classes in their facilities in 2012.

The LAC remained important to Alisa’s RE offerings in her county in her third year (2011-2012) providing RE as well. Alisa proposed similar RE activities and Alisa followed her previous pattern used for maintaining her relationship with the council. She wrote:

January 24, 2012—We were pleased to have 32 people attend the LAC meeting at a restaurant. This group was able to assist us with fine-tuning our plans for the Latino Relationships Series in April. . . . Several people volunteered to teach and/or knew of others who would be willing to teach a workshop. The group also helped us make our advertising more Latino-friendly. Everyone agreed to advertise for us as soon as the updated flyer was available. I believe that this council is the key to successful Latino programming.

In reflecting on her partnerships over three years, Alisa, again, focused on the benefits of individual members of her LAC. Alisa stated, “Local pastors and church leaders in the area … seem to be doing a great job of getting the information out to their members. On evaluations, many participants indicate that they heard about the program from their church.” Alisa also focused on the current status and value of her LAC in general:

Our LAC continues to actively help us make our Latino programming a success. We have approximately 40 active members who meet annually to help us tweak our advertising, identify speakers/workshop presenters, approve curriculum, and recommend topics for the workshops. In addition, they provide locations such as schools, churches, etc. to hold the Latino programming. Each member of the LAC takes a very active role in helping us advertise the program.

Alisa concluded her thoughts on her experiences with partnerships in providing RE by saying, “Our collaboration with other agencies and organizations is essential to our success.”

Discussion

The results illustrate that university-community partnerships are vital in offering RE, and that these partnerships constitute an evolving process. The case studies provide contrasts in quality and maintenance of partnerships. Laura’s partnerships evolved due to changes in the community organization. In her in-
terview, Laura mentioned that the size and remoteness of her county made for challenges in travel and even in communication; an aspect that would likely be different in an urban setting. Alisa capitalized on her partnership with the county’s Latino Advisory Council, a group with regular meetings and whose purposes included not only RE but other issues. Together the Extension faculty members articulated their experience with the identification, formation, sustainability, and outcomes of their university-community partnerships.

Identifying potential partners is obviously a key step in the process, but the data from this longitudinal study makes it clear that some proposed partnerships came to fruition and others did not. It is clear that these participants had to become comfortable with change and uncertainty when it came to collaborations. Moreover, partnerships changed over time as the vitality of the partnering organization itself evolved. Futris (2007) indicated that process of identifying community partners requires university faculty to identify their needed resources and skills and then to recognize community organizations that meet these needs.

The Extension faculty members in this study identified their needs primarily as audiences and organizations with existing structure. Schools, churches, and existing coalitions were identified as desired community partners. This is consistent with previous research on university-community partnerships (Jackson & Reddick, 1999; Prins, 2006). For example, Jackson and Reddick (1999) identified churches as community partners to develop early health detection and prevention networks for African Americans residents. Also, Prins (2006), in her case study of key members in a university-community partnership developed to plan a community park and provide youth development services in a rural California town, identified schools as effective partners. Schools have been identified to be ideal community partners for implementing university programs that are designed for eliminating social and economic problems in rural settings, because schools are both civic and social centers.

The themes from all five agents and the two case studies make it clear that partnerships help in terms of tapping into existing audiences, as well as gaining access to existing organizational structures and even physical facilities. The methods of initial contact were not surprising (e.g., letters or email, presentations), but the study results also highlight the importance of identifying the right contact person within a given organization. In their study of university-community partnerships, Carlton et al. (2009) similarly found that “having the right people to do the job is critical to anyone’s success” (p. 34).

Faculty members involved their community partners from the beginning of the program which allowed many of the community partners to catch the vision of RE in their community. They did this through holding meetings and seeking advice on cultural sensitivity of recruitment and program implementation. Jackson and Reddick (1999) indicated that successful university-community partnerships were formed when the community organization was involved early in the planning process. Community organizations may have limitations in resources, such as money, education, to provide large-scale projects. By involving partners early in the planning they can catch the vision about how reciprocal needs can be met through the university-community partnership.

Power differentials may arise in university-community partnerships because of the imbalance of resources, knowledge of the community, education, or skills (Prins, 2006). Sorenson and Lawson (2012) developed university-community partnerships to revitalize a city with services such as landscape architecture, community clean-up, and the establishment of computer labs throughout the city. One identified challenge was that community members in the partnership did not have the skills to allow them to collaborate on an equal level with students and faculty. Formal training sessions were implemented for community members and also knowledge was transferred through working/participating together. This may be similar to the process of faculty members in the current study, they involved their partners in identifying the purpose of RE and over time partners participated in the events, began to teach at events, and even found ways to provide RE independent of the university. This also sounds consistent with Hawkins and colleagues’ (2004) recommendation to make RE a community wide effort.

Laninga, Austin, and McClure (2012) implemented community design and development projects in three rural communities in Idaho through university-community partnerships. They explained that forming university-community partnerships was a time-intensive process. Faculty members in the current study validated this challenge in the formation process. Different than results in the current study, Laninga et al. (2012) described their formation process as contractual—a formal contract was developed outlining responsibilities, key roles, and financial contributions from the community and the university. Faculty members did not address the structure of their community partnerships beyond frequency of
meeting and who served as members on coalitions. Additional research on the structuring of university-community partnerships and RE is necessary.

Futris (2007) suggested that the structure, leadership, goals, and evaluation are the qualities that sustain university-community partnerships. The faculty members illustrated that, once formed, partnerships benefited from ongoing maintenance. In some cases, this was accomplished via formal coalitions that held regular meetings, and in other cases, check-ins were less frequent and less formal. This is again consistent with the results from Carlton et al. (2009), specifically regarding not only the strength but also the duration of collaborative relationships (including interpersonal respect). Faculty members indicated that many of their partnerships were self-sustaining and that they continued to work with partnerships that seemed to be working well. It may be that the interpersonal relationships developed with these community partners helped sustain the university-community relationship. Jackson and Reddick (1999) concluded, “It appears that a core system of personal interactions sustains the relationship and serves as a foundation for building strong ties and effective collaborations” (p. 673).

None of the faculty formally talked about their leadership, structure, or evaluation of their partnerships. It was implied that many faculty members perceived that their community partners did value their own role in providing RE in their community. Israel and colleagues (2006) formed university-community relationship to address issues of public health in three urban communities. They identified that sustaining community partners required a clear evidence of community benefit and a public recognition of the contributions of the community partners. Faculty members acknowledged the value of partners in their reports, but there was no mention of formal recognition of their partnering organizations accomplishments.

Conclusions and Implications

The current study provided a rich understanding of the processes involved in identifying, forming, and sustaining university-community partnerships to provide RE over time. Through university-community collaboration unique audiences were reached, support was provided for program implementation, and increases in RE involvement were apparent at a community level. It appears that current practices within this sample are close to the best practices identified in the broader university-community literature (e.g., Jackson & Reddick, 1999; Sorenson and Lawson, 2012). A strength of the particular study was that both urban and rural counties were included in the analyses. Prins (2006) indicated that the majority of university-partnership studies have focused on only urban counties. There are limitations to this study because of the homogeneity of the sample, and only the university side of the partnership was evaluated. Future research should investigate the process of university-community partnerships from RE facilitators who represent different ethnicities, gender, and locations. Also, collecting data concerning the partnering community agency would be essential.

Practice and research implications can be derived from results from this study. It appears that facilitators of RE are identifying community agencies with which to partner that meet their needs. It is unclear whether formal structure or leadership is present in the university-community relationships. Models of effective university-community partnerships have suggested that structure and leadership is needed for sustainable partnerships (cf. Futris, 2007). Formal structure and leadership is apparent in university-community partnerships in different disciplines (Laninga et al. 2012) and perhaps additional training and research of how to formally structure these relationships in practice is needed in applied family science. Structure, leadership, goals, evaluation (Futris, 2007), interpersonal relationships, and community partners recognition of the benefits of the partnership (Israel et al., 2006) are the proposed qualities for partnership sustainability. The current study provided some evidence of common goals and strong interpersonal relationships. However, there was not a clear understanding of how faculty members evaluated their partnerships beyond continued contact and participation or how community partner’s accomplishments were publicly recognized.

This study adds to the current literature about university-community partnerships in that, although these partnerships were not very structured or formal, they did work. It might be useful to explore in more detail, with future research, why they worked. Is it the interpersonal relationships that sustained the relationships? Is it what could be described as somewhat of an intuitive approach to partnerships, rather than formal structure, leadership, and evaluation that held them together? If so, what is that process, and how can others be trained to use it?

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Developing Conceptual and Methodological Foundations in Community Engagement

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Abstract

We describe the efforts of two related undergraduate projects to promote lasting social change in marginalized communities in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. The projects represent a test of the premise that undergraduate projects can engage academically based strategies and transcend good intentions to achieve effective community partnerships to improve health and health care. The projects proceed from a perspective and theory of marginalization and its consequences. Specifically, marginalization undermines individual and collective capacity to meet basic needs and efforts to thrive. Through strengthening social infrastructure, communities can overcome the effects of marginalization. Project work begins with annual medical clinics and, with the permission of community residents, team members conduct ethnographic descriptions of the communities and their health and health care concerns and resources. We use social network analysis (SNA) and geographic information system (GIS) techniques to describe social infrastructure. Working from those foundations, both projects have enabled increased social infrastructure. To date, we have observed increased communication among community residents, facilitated the development of community-endorsed five-year plans, and established partnerships with regional and international groups.

Community Engagement: Conceptual and Methodological Foundations

Introduction

Writing from a student perspective, Bessaw, Gerke, Hamilton, and Pulsipher (2012) sketch issues that dog those committed to community engagement and scholarship in higher education: constraints on time, energy, and talent; compressed time frames; community apathy; and issues of trust. Over the course of the semester, these ambitious graduate students in bioregional planning hosted five community meetings. They reported that a core of about 10 residents attended meetings regularly and that they struggled to communicate effectively with residents throughout the community. Some residents expressed concerns about sustainability and some recalled earlier failed attempts at organizing. Still, Bessaw and her colleagues report that none of the locals stepped into active roles of leadership and that residents remained discouraged about prospects for the future.

To be certain, community engaged scholarship in higher education faces challenges in addition to these, including institutional resources and academic values. Still, the issues identified by Bessaw et al. (2012) are sufficiently daunting and pervasive to warrant unpacking, closer examination, and some effort toward resolution.

Often, students and scholars are drawn to community engagement by their concerns for inequities and injustices of various sorts, including those that involve health, the environment, employment, and human rights. For example, Bessaw et al. (2012) responded to issues of high unemployment in Priest River, Idaho. It is unlikely that these students expected to accomplish fundamental economic change. Instead, they articulated the following goals: (1) to establish a common vision; (2) to create a toolbox for the community to use in future projects; and (3) to identify leaders to ensure project sustainability. These students, and others who pursue community engagement research and action, share in common with contemporary students of international development certain philosophical predispositions (cf. Handler, 2013):

- Intentional social change or development can be progress toward a better life,
- Community-engaged work and development should entail cooperative, egalitarian social relationships.
- Good communications are central to community-engaged social change and development

SOMOS and MANOS

Undergraduate students at William & Mary combined these predispositions with concerns about health disparities in marginalized communities to
form two independent but closely related projects: the Student Organization for Medical Outreach and Sustainability (SOMOS, working in a barrio near Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic) and Medical Aid Nicaragua: Outreach Scholarship (MANOS, working in communities in the micro-region of Cuje, Nicaragua). With the guidance of a faculty mentor (co-author Aday), students in the two projects confronted the challenge of figuring out what undergraduates could offer to those who lack even the most basic health services. Working with the communities, SOMOS and MANOS sought to respond to the health problems that confront people in countries around the world: water, flooding, nutrition, and non-communicable diseases, among others.

Over time, the projects have taken shape, emerging as variants of community-engaged scholarship. They are grounded in theories of marginalization, alienation and an evolving model of participatory development. The work proceeds through community-based research that is based in a developing partnership between the communities and the projects (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Students at William & Mary compete for selection and remain with the project until they graduate. All team members take a required seminar each semester of their tenure, which has necessitated the creation of a pedagogy that takes into account the needs of both new and seasoned members. These arrangements answer some, but not all, of the issues raised by Bessaw and her co-authors. For example, the problem of constrained time is mitigated somewhat because team members work in the same communities (in each country) over years — now nearly a decade in both countries. Project teams travel each year for week-long trips (SOMOS during the semester break and MANOS during the spring break). Smaller teams do field research, project development and implementation during the summer and at one other time each year (i.e., semester break for MANOS and spring break for SOMOS). The summer work typically consists of several weeks to two months of continuous engagement. In total, project teams are in the communities in each country for seven to 10 weeks each year. In addition, we remain in phone or internet communication with our community partners throughout the year, in spite of the fact that both communities lack convenient access to even the most basic infrastructure (e.g., telephone lines or reliable electricity).

Inadequate resources continue to nag but some partnering strategies are providing modest hope for progress. For example, both projects, in partnership with the communities, have submitted successful proposals for collaborating with Engineers Without Borders (EWB). Beginning with very limited engagement by residents and with widespread discouragement in both communities, our efforts have focused on nurturing collective capacity. The EWB proposals were advanced through community committees comprising elected or selected representatives from each of the block or focus groups in each community. The committees were selected by groups of residents, and these groups were identified through multiple rounds of social networks analysis, as described below. The committees are gaining status as standing arrangements to act on behalf of the communities on matters concerning access to water in Nicaragua and flood mitigation in the Dominican Republic. EWB teams have visited the communities, collected data necessary to engineering proposals, and are working through community arrangements that have been nurtured through SOMOS and MANOS efforts in the communities.

What follows is an account of the framing theory, evolving model of development, and basic methods of research of the SOMOS and MANOS projects. An overarching hope of this work is that students, professionals, and, most of all, community residents will see that intentional social change is possible through effective partnerships that combine systematic knowledge and local wisdom.

From Philosophy to Perspective

SOMOS and MANOS began through the initiative of undergraduate students whose understandings of community engagement were enlightened by direct experience in service and humanitarian projects. In both cases, students returned from “health brigade/duffel bag medicine” (Roberts, 2006) trips with a strong sense of futility: “Like putting a Band Aid on cancer,” observed a founding member of SOMOS. However, none of the original student members had clear notions about what could be done to satisfy their sense that good intentions are not sufficient, or to tap the power of knowledge and research of their university setting.

From the start, we agreed to some mantras:

- Good intentions are dangerous things
- Every helping act is a political decision
- Change is not sustainable unless it creates new resources

It was clear that improving health and health care would be the central focus of our work.
We began by hosting annual free clinics in both communities. SOMOS established a relationship with an alumnus physician, and he became the medical director in the Dominican Republic. The team partnered with a health foundation (Fundación Sol Naciente), whose founding director also is the director of Physicians for Peace for Latin America and the Caribbean. Medical providers are recruited annually and oftentimes more than half-a-dozen medical professionals accompany the project. In Nicaragua, MANOS contracted with a physician from Managua. In exchange for salary and travel expenses, this medical professional has provided clinical services and leadership from the beginning. More recently, American-trained medical professionals have joined the clinical staff and provide expertise for the clinical aspect of the project work.

The medical clinics do not yield the envisioned improvements in health and health care. Rather, they provide entrée to the communities: SOMOS and MANOS offer annual clinics and then ask residents if they may conduct research in order to find more continuous and sustainable strategies for improving health and health care. This practice of offering a concrete and needed resource provides initial credibility and encouragement about the prospects for change.  

In the first years, students approached the work with a variety of notions about the causes of observed problems of health, safety, and well-being, including the following:

- Lack of information and education
- Unemployment and limited job skills
- Discrimination on the basis of national (e.g., Haitian) and ethnic (e.g., Chorotega indigenous) status
- National and international economic exploitation
- Poverty

As the seminars continued, students expressed suspicions that these problems did not exist as separate entities but instead represented recognizable symptoms of a greater and more systemic issue. In the course of studying literature on service, voluntarism, community, and social change, and through descriptive field research (ethnographic and GPS-based observations of the community), a perspective emerged that focused attention on marginalization. To illustrate how the current theory and model developed from these initial hunches, early research findings are summarized below (2007–2009).

SOMOS students made early and thought-provoking observations about Paraiso, a region consisting of multiple barrios, or communities. For example, although Paraiso sits within a twenty-minute walk of a major metropolitan center with access to most parts of Santo Domingo, many parts of the area are rural. The transition from urban to rural occurs abruptly as the traveler leaves a major urban street (paved) and turns onto a rough and rutted dirt road that leads to the main sub-community of Altos de Paraiso. From these observations, SOMOS appropriated the term “para-urban” to describe the locality of the Paraiso region and to characterize aspects of Paraiso’s physical and socio-economic location.

Esfuerzo is one of the barrios that comprise the area known as Paraiso, and is the focus of our current research and development projects. It provides a micro example of social and geographic positioning of community. It is cut off from the rest of Paraiso by a flood control canal that either reduces or worsens the effects of flooding for members of the Paraiso community, depending on where they live. Those who benefit most from the canal live in the community of Altos, which means “high.” Altos is adjacent to Esfuerzo, but as its name suggests, it enjoys both higher elevation and better access to basic resources, including water, electricity, and our own annual medical clinics, which are hosted in the Altos public school. In a significant sense, the SOMOS team discovered Esfuerzo as residents of Altos attempted to guide field research away from}

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1. In the beginning, nearly all of the funds for the project work came from students, either directly or through modest fundraising efforts. Over time, the projects have been fortunate to attract donors who currently make annual gifts to support the ongoing work. We are particularly grateful to donors to the Patricia W. Sisson Fund and to a fund created by Luis Navas for their continuing support, without which our work would not be possible.

2. We are about to undertake an analysis of student learning outcomes. We will examine and compare essays written by applicants and reflective papers written by the same students following at least one field research experience. The scoring rubric will focus on key features of the SOMOS/MANOS Model.

3. Para comes from the Greek preposition that means both “beside, next to, or near” and “against or contrary to,” and urban, which refers to the pattern of development of greater Santo Domingo.

4. The concept and empirical realities of community are complicated and require careful specification. For a more fulsome examination of the concept and its relevance for “community engaged” efforts, see Aday et al. (under review).
the locality, expressing the opinion that the area is not part of the larger community (Paraiso). Over the next years, it was determined empirically that Esfuerzo actually was and is part of Paraiso. The municipal government identifies it as “Esfuerzo de Paraiso,” though early on, residents of the local barrio were uncertain of its official designation, even referring to it by various derogatory names.

Most of the residents of Esfuerzo have lived in the community for about 10 years and were displaced from their earlier residences by the expansion of tourism (as part of larger, national economic shifts and changes in agricultural labor (especially increased employment of Haitian sugarcane workers; cf. Gregory, 2006). There are few extended family ties in the community and the residents are not able to find steady work with the low-level farm-labor skills that they have.

The MANOS team works in a micro-region called Cuje, which comprises eight remote and widely dispersed communities. Our research and development projects are centered currently in Chaguite. Some of the communities are geographically identifiable by proximity to a school that bears the community name. Otherwise, there are few local features to signify collective identity.

The historical, political, and economic sources of marginalization in Chaguite center on the clear-cutting of the evergreen forests that characterized the region until the 1960s. At that time, residents of the micro-region mostly engaged in hunting and fishing for their livelihood. With accommodating national policies, foreign corporations purchased land resources rights and proceeded to cut trees. With few remaining trees, the ponds and lakes dried up and the small game stocks were exhausted quickly. Within a decade, the region began to experience alternating flooding and drought and residents turned to subsistence farming without the knowledge or skills needed and with little arable land beyond the rapidly eroding hillsides (Manachon & Gonda, 2010).

The faculty advisor for both SOMOS and MANOS had the advantage of observing across the projects and noted important similarities in both clinical and research findings. For example, while the localities are disparate (para-urban vs.

5 The residents of the region did not have developed understandings about property or property rights. Residents were told that they could claim such rights and then sell the rights to the American and Cuban companies that wanted to harvest forest resources. We learned about these events most directly through field interviews. Efforts to document the events historically have been difficult, but some reliable information is available in books published in Spanish (for example, Manachon and Gonda, 2010.)

extremely remote, rural, and sparsely populated), the communities share core health issues: flooding; lack of access to clean water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning; poor nutrition; and high rates of diabetes and hypertension.

Field research, consisting of house-to-house interviews and geo-coding in Esfuerzo and in Chaguite, yielded descriptions of housing, water resources, sanitation, flooding, and health resources and risks. The projects’ goals were to: (1) learn about residents’ health and health care concerns; (2) identify collectively shared priorities; and, (3) use the resulting understandings to encourage community engagement in collective efforts through a sense of commonality. Responding in part to conventional and common sense notions about social change and community organization, SOMOS and MANOS proceeded with efforts to identify leaders. More specifically we sought local residents who could help to communicate and to catalyze participation and engagement. Some of the early responses proved to be revealing. For example, in Esfuerzo, when we asked, “whom do you trust in the community,” the most common response was “no one,” followed by “God.” Next, we piloted interviews to determine the appropriate form and construction of questions that might help to identify local informal leaders and opinion-makers. Based on that study, researchers asked, “Who fights on behalf of the community?” Residents identified locals who had been part of the junta de vecino (a neighborhood association sanctioned by the mayor’s office, which is very far removed from the locality). However, probing further, interviewers learned that some of those same people had been discredited by allegations of graft. While these former junta members were identified as people “who fight for the community,” many residents did not trust them to do so. The interviews revealed widely shared sentiments of discouragement: “people are lazy and will not work”; “people are selfish and do not help others”; “little can be done without help from the government, and worse, the government never helps” (Aday, Owning change …, under review).

Early work in Chaguite revealed similar patterns. In the first round of interviews, residents identified mayor representatives as local leaders, but many made clear as well that the representatives only worked with people of their own political party (the party of the incumbent mayor). They reported that these representatives were in touch with the mayor’s office only rarely and that the representatives would not likely be able to help much in any case. Residents identified brigadistas (health care volunteers) as
leaders, but they were uncertain of the role and the responsibilities of those who were so designated—except in the case of acute medical emergencies (e.g., to help in summoning the ambulance from the municipal clinic). Many residents noted that they are not in communication with anyone and that they must rely on themselves and God.

**Emerging Perspective and Theory**

Thoughtful reading of the literature of international politics and economics, development, and public health reveals that the poor and underprivileged around the world share health problems similar to those in Chaguite and Esfuerzo, in addition to other issues such as limited access to education and high rates of unemployment, drug and alcohol use, and domestic violence. This systematic understanding of the literature combined with direct observations in two distinct countries and cultures suggest an over-arching and framing perspective that highlights marginalization, both geographically and social structurally. Drawing from Vasas (2005), we define marginalization as “a process that pushes people, groups, communities, regions, and nations to the edges of spaces (physical and social), resources, and efficacy (ability to affect and to effect activities necessary to survive and thrive” (Aday, under review). The concept served to sensitize subsequent research, but observations suggested a need for finer articulation. We drew from Seeman’s (1959) analysis of alienation. He notes that alienation is a central theme in the classical works of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber and it continues to occupy the attention of contemporary sociologists. More importantly for current purposes, Seeman points to five distinguishable meanings that can be derived from work on the concept: powerlessness, meaningless, normlessness, isolation, and self-stranglement. Though we have not yet analyzed the data fully through this articulated framework, the concepts of marginalization and alienation form the basis of a general theory and an emerging model of participatory development (cf. Jennings, 2000; Chambers, 1995; Kapoor, 2002).6

Our general view is that marginalization produces alienation and that, together, these social, structural, and geographical forces undermine individual and collective capacities for meeting basic individual and collective needs and hinder individual and collective efforts to thrive.7 As noted, some residents of Esfuerzo have experienced marginalization as they have been pushed from agricultural settings (including sugar cane plantations) and from other localities with the development of the tourism economy. Many residents report that they will remain in the community only until they are able to find some more viable residence. The residents of Chaguite have experienced the effects of extractive economies, beginning most clearly in contemporary time with the exploitation of land resources (including timber), and clear-cutting of their evergreen forests by foreign logging companies. Marginalization of the Chorotega indigenous people of the region began many centuries earlier with the arrival of the Aztecs and Spanish conquistadors (Manachon & Gonda, 2010).

**From Theory to Model and Strategy**

Residents of Chaguite and Esfuerzo have experienced marginalization and live in communities that are marginalized. Geographically and structurally, the communities are cut off from services enjoyed by other localities, including access to fresh water, sanitation, and electricity. They also do not enjoy effective representation in municipal decision-making and lack social infrastructure (social, political, and economic organization) that would enable collective and collaborative effort. From these observations, the projects moved towards embracing a role as partners with the communities with the goal of nurturing individual and collective capacities, defined initially as “the ability to achieve individually and collectively defined goals and objectives through sustainable infrastructure” (Aday, 2012, p. 1).

The SOMOS and MANOS teams worked independently (but collaboratively) to articulate a community-based strategy to promote improved health and health care. We drew from the developing literature on participatory development (cf. Chambers, 1995; Kapoor, 2002; and Jennings, 2000) to conceptualize a role and a relationship to fit the theoretical view. Our goal was not to impose a paradigm based in American middle-class notions of success or achievement, but to foster a relationship that would allow the communities to articulate their own goals and develop their own methods for pursuing those goals.

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6 We will not explicate the theory fully here. The central insight was that we observed obstacles to individual and collective efforts to thrive and these obstacles were both structural and geographical.

7 In general, residents of Paraiso and Cuje are not at risk of not surviving. Most will manage subsistence and some will do better than that. However, most will not thrive and will not succeed in getting the education, health care, or employment opportunities to fundamentally improve their lives beyond subsistence (cf. O’Leary and Ickovics, 1995).
Working through annual medical clinics in both communities, we made clear our apprehensions about the limited efficacy of these episodic clinical efforts. Researchers engaged residents in discussions about their health and health care issues and concerns. Residents expressed appreciation for the clinics and agreed that there are certain fundamental issues that undermine health: access to clean water, nutritional deficiencies, and long-term effects of environmental degradation and flooding. They must have wondered – as we did initially – what student groups from an American college could offer by way of partnering to solve these crucial problems.

Residents expressed appreciation for the careful efforts we made to get to know them. Early ethnographic studies communicated interest, concern, compassion, and attention to detail. Project students eagerly embraced basic training in field research methods and pursued fieldwork diligently. We incorporated Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques because of the theoretical (geographic) perspective on marginalization and to facilitate systematic description. The field research provided opportunities for building interpersonal relationships. Residents of both communities have great capacity for hospitality, but they are not automatically welcoming to strangers. They have reasons for suspicion and even fear, but project team members express authentic interest in learning from residents and listening carefully to their issues and ideas for finding solutions.

Summarizing, the SOMOS/MANOS model, as described to this point, includes the following elements:

- A preconception of the possibility of positive social change through cooperative and egalitarian relationships and effective communication
- A theory of marginalization and alienation and their consequences
- A focus on community as the unit of analysis and the source for sustainable change
- An unconditional contribution to the community that provides a service valued by the community (annual clinics)
- Social science and geographic-spatial research methods (a) to describe the community and its resources and risks, (b) to identify and document shared concerns as part of a process for constructing social problems, and, (c) to map interpersonal relationships as part of a process for promoting organized collective action.

Beginning in the summer of 2008 (in Esfuerzo, Dominican Republic) and in March 2009 (in Chaguite, Nicaragua,) project team members built from previous field-work and began to conduct interviews focused more specifically on identifying community leaders: residents who might help to organize collective efforts to achieve goals related to health and health care priorities. Drawing from sociological theory on how personal troubles become public issues and emerge as collectively defined social problems (cf. C. Wright Mills, 1959; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) team members sought to both identify household-level health concerns and, subsequently, to communicate information that revealed the extent to which these concerns were shared within the community. The projects adopted the analytical techniques of SNA (see Tichy & Fombrun, 1979; Marsden, 1990; Haythornthwaite, 1996; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005), interviewing residents within their homes and asking them to identify people who work on behalf of or for the good of their community. 8

The goal of the social networks studies was to identify organic interpersonal networks of communications, collaboration, and leadership. Interviews generated information about how residents relate to one another. Based in matrix algebra, SNA techniques allow researchers to see patterns of interpersonal ties among individuals, identified as nodes. Our ethnographic research had suggested that there was little communication or collaboration in either of the communities and that geography played a central role in interpersonal connections in both communities. Our first efforts focused on leadership relationships (“who works or ‘fights’ on behalf of the community?”). Our later efforts attended to the possibility that there are geographic locations where people communicate more regularly (intersecting footpaths or small markets, for example).

In addition to describing patterns of association, communication, and leadership, we wanted to test our understandings about marginalization and alienation: To what extent do people help one another, collaborate for mutual aid, or support efforts

8 See Aday, et al. (under review) for a more detailed description of the beginning efforts in social networks analysis. This paper provides a more extended examination of the use of the technique for understanding community and for developing partnerships to promote individual and community capacity.
to meet collective needs? Our emerging theory was that residents are able to engage collective efforts in part dependent on the extent to which they are connected through communications, collaboration, and leadership. We saw measures of network density as one promising empirical indicator of this possibility. Network density refers to the proportion of interpersonal connections that respondents report as compared to the total of all possible dyadic relationships in a community (Hawe, Webster, & Shiell, 2004; Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Scott, 2011; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Logically, socio-centric density (the proportion of interpersonal ties for a community) has a maximum value of 1.00 — or, 100%; that is, all possible dyadic pairs are connected. There is not sufficient descriptive research in this field to allow characterization of variations in density, but conceptually and practically, density should be related to communication flow, collaboration, and prospects for organized efforts: the more interpersonal ties, the better the flow of information across a network, and the greater the prospects for collaboration and organization. In both Esfuerzo and Chaguite, reported ties constituted less than three percent of the possible relationships. It is important to note that there are methodological problems with the data that ground this conclusion. To date, a population survey of the communities (for example, all households within each community or all adults within each community) has not been completed, but studies have included almost the entire population of households in both communities. Still, it seems almost certain that these low levels of density in communities that are relatively stable (low transience) and geographically bounded (about 90 occupied dwellings in Esfuerzo and fewer than 50 in Chaguite) support the projects’ conception of marginalization.

Findings from early SNA explorative studies coupled with the evolving perspective, theory, and model suggested a focused strategy: nurture awareness of shared understandings of health concerns and promote increased communications to enhance individual and collective capacities. Drawing from SNA studies done subsequently (2008–2010), project teams identified subgroups within each community that involved central “nodes” (individuals within a network analysis) who are connected to others via reported interpersonal ties.

Figure 1 is a representation of network ties in Chaguite in 2010. The seven blue squares in the upper left corner of the figure are respondents who named no one and were not named by anyone in interviews in which we attempted to identify patterns of communication and collaboration. In network terms, they are isolates. Recognizing that there were 53 respondents representing the same number of households, the analysis suggests that 13% of the population (of households) is not connected to others in the community. The larger red squares identify those residents named most frequently as people who work on behalf of the community and with whom they discuss matters of community concern, and the size of the squares reflects the relative number of ties, or interpersonal connections associated with each. Clearly, resident #38, was identified most frequently. Four other residents constitute network nodes with high reachability scores; that is, these individuals connect either directly or indirectly to a relatively large number of others within the community. Examining those subgroups and displaying the results spatially using GPS and GIS techniques helps identify clusters of households that optimize existing ties. In follow-up interviews, researchers asked residents if they thought it would be useful for them to meet in the identified groupings for the purpose of discussing common concerns about health and health care. In Chaguite, the residents not only endorsed the groupings,
they proceeded almost immediately to
discussions about electing leaders for the
groups. Figure 2 provides a geographic
and social network characterization of
the resulting organizing arrangement.

It is clear that the networks and
the pathways are related. This is not
surprising, given the remoteness of the
area, the absence of transportation, the
reliance on footpaths, and the difficulty
of traveling in any straight line between
points within the region. Those who
share a common path are more likely
to know one another, to share a water
source, and to communicate with one
another.

The SOMOS project followed
similar methods to map Esfuerzo both
geographically and using SNA. The resulting groups,
based in organic ties, have become the organizing
frameworks for community collaboration. Issues
are discussed within these regional groups to
increase opportunities for everyone to participate
and to express individual opinions. Agreements
reached in these groups are brought forward to
community meetings. Through these arrangements,
SOMOS and MANOS have built partnerships
with the communities and collaborated to craft
and gain community approval for five-year plans to
improve health and health care. The plans include
priorities, goals, objectives, and methods. They have
formed the foundation for a community/MANOS
partnership with Nicaraguan universities to improve
access to clean water for some households. In
both Chaguite and Esfuerzo, the project teams
have facilitated the development of proposals
for partnerships with Engineers Without Borders
(EWB) and those proposals have been approved by
EWB. The Chaguite project has been adopted by
the EWB chapter at California State Polytechnic
University, Pomona, School of Engineering.

Stated simply, the strategy is to understand
community issues of marginalization as expressed in
low-density scores (limited interpersonal ties across
the community), to identify organic networks of
interpersonal ties, and to nurture those as organizing
elements. These organic networks have become the
locus for discussing community health concerns.
With some encouragement from the project team
members, the groups engage practices9 of discussion
and collaboration that result in increased capacity
for collective action at the community level.

Conclusions

Bessaw et al. (2012) raise significant questions
about the impact of student-organized community
engagement, questions about the sufficiency of time
and other resources and about engaging community
members in ways that yield sustainable solutions.
Their brief article does not provide details about
their approach, and we do not presume their
orientation, perspective, or methods. Rather, we use
the questions as a starting point for describing two
projects in different countries, asking how we have
fared, and more generically, whether it is possible
for students to pursue community engagement
beyond well-intentioned voluntarism. Are the
challenges and roadblocks necessarily beyond the
scope of students?

We believe that the theory of marginalization and
alienation help us to better understand the context
in which we find the observed problems of health
and health care. This theoretical understanding
prepares us to ask better, more focused questions
about our own role in the communities in which
we work. Seeing manifestations of marginalization
and alienation, we did not embrace common sense
strategies such as collaboration and endorsement of
formal leaders. If these leaders are not trusted or if
they do not participate in effective communications
arrangements, their role may contribute little to
reducing marginalization or increasing capacity.
The use of GPS and GIS techniques to develop
descriptions of the community and the arrangement
of interpersonal networks provided important clues

9 There is not space in the current paper to describe the practices
that are yet another part of the evolving model. The projects are
drawing from a developing literature on cultural leadership practices
that provide a foundation for approaching community engagement in
ways that are both inclusive and promise to be effective in achieving
identified outcomes. See, for example, Kirk and Shutte, 2004, Cre-
about how to encourage inclusive communications and discussions at regional levels. SNA studies provided empirical indicators of community organization (and, by inference, marginalization) and helped us to identify meaningful organic interpersonal and communications networks.

Our projects have faced challenging moments, including poorly attended meetings, failed communications, and momentum lost due to efforts that were poorly organized (by us and by various project partners). We continue to have too few material resources and fewer dollars than we need. We have worked self-consciously to articulate our theory, our methods, and our role in the community, and new students enter projects that are complicated. We face the significant challenge of ensuring that new students come up to speed and understand the foundations and history of the work — and that they feel empowered to question, challenge, and bring new ideas and perspectives.

To date, we have measured project success in the following observed outcomes: (1) improved communications; (2) emerging regional organizations that promote inclusive conversations about health and health care issues; (3) the development and ratification of five-year development plans in each community; (4) the development of successful proposals for partnerships with Engineers Without Borders; and (5) the implementation of community committees to undertake specific projects, including health and health care planning and flood mitigation. In the near future, we will undertake, with our community partners, projects that are intended to improve directly the health and health care in the communities. If our theory is correct, our efforts to increase community capacity should produce strategies and tactics that reflect local wisdom and that benefit from the investments of those who are expected to benefit.

Throughout, we have been determined to stay focused through the best of systematic research and theory. We hear residents’ expressions of hopelessness and dependency and we understand them through the structure and consequences of marginalization. These concerns challenge us to find strategies that will promote individual and collective capacities and to avoid those that will nurture dependence. We see signs of enhanced engagement in residents’ willingness to take on collective responsibilities, in attendance at community meetings, and in inclusive and reliable communications.

SOMOS and MANOS are testing the proposition that students can pursue community engaged scholarship through academic and disciplinary foundations, exceed the limitations of good intentions, and participate authentically with community partners in fostering positive social change.

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Local residents and MANOS team members view map to examine community data.
The Spoken Word Project: Using Poetry in Community Dialogue and Mobilization for HIV Prevention

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Abstract

Spoken word, a form of performance poetry, is a promising approach to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, as it has the potential to encourage dialogue among and within communities and address concerns regarding the social stigma present in rural communities. The purpose of this study is to describe the development and implementation of the Spoken Word Project (SWP), an HIV/AIDS pilot intervention in rural North Carolina designed to improve HIV-related attitudes and self-efficacy and decrease stigma through the use of performance poetry. Spoken word is a collaborative effort between residents of two rural counties in North Carolina and Project GRACE (Growing, Reaching, Advocating for Change and Empowerment), a community-based participatory research collaboration aimed at reducing health disparities in African American communities. The project included 15 adult and youth participants. Results indicated that spoken word has the ability to build upon local resources, generate community reflection, and engage a broad spectrum of performers and audiences. Our findings also showed that the effect of stigma and limited community conversations about HIV in rural communities can be abated through the use of spoken word.

Of all U.S. regions, the South has the highest rates of HIV diagnoses – 23.8 per 100,000 (Reif, Whetten, Osterman, & Raper, 2006); and 64% of people living with AIDS in rural areas reside in Southern states (Reif & Whetten, 2012). As these rural areas continue to disparately experience the burden of HIV/AIDS, limited community conversations about HIV severely hamper prevention efforts (Hovey, Booker, & Seligman, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2005; McEwan, Bhopal, & Patton, 1991)). The social challenges of HIV stigma, fear, and denial impede the delivery of prevention messages and efforts to mobilize communities most in need of intervention (Darrow, Montanea, & Gladwin, 2009; Foster, 2007). Prevention efforts in rural communities are further challenged by prevalent poverty that is linked to less HIV-related knowledge and a tendency to stigmatize those affected by the condition (Des Jarlais, Galea, Tracy, Tross, & Vlahov, 2006; Foster, 2007; Hovey, Booker, & Seligman, 2007). In 2010, a report released by the White House Office of National AIDS Policy further described stigma as adversely impacting willingness to be tested for HIV, to disclose their serostatus to sex partners, and adherence to antiretroviral therapy among people with HIV/AIDS. The report recommended strategies to reduce stigma, which included community engagement to support people with HIV/AIDS and developing new public health approaches to HIV prevention (White House Office of National AIDS Policy, 2010). One such innovative approach, performance poetry, holds promise to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, foster dialogue among communities, and overcome the social stigma present in rural communities.

Poetry, along with other artistic forms of expression, has a rich history as a tool for community mobilization and has the potential to provide an innovative approach to dismantling social challenges (Niba & Green, 2005). Performance poetry, a form of poetry often performed as a dramatized monologue in the presence of an audience, provides a platform to transcend stigma and marginalization associated with HIV/AIDS, both of which are significant challenges to rural HIV prevention (Pietrzyk, 2009). In addition, the use of performance poetry can have both individual and community level benefits. Performers often report a sense of individual empowerment and self-healing from the process of self-reflection and sharing of their life experiences (Chung, Corbett, Boulet, Cummings, Paxton, McDaniel, Mercier, Franklin, Mercier, Jones, Collins, Koegel, Duan, Wells, & Glik, 2006; Des Jarlais et al., 2006; Valente & Bharath, 1999). For the audience or broader community, performance poetry encourages dialogue around HIV; dispels stigma by encouraging community-wide empathy and social responsibility; and creates opportunities to discuss strategies for communities to engage in HIV prevention (Moyo, 2010). In addition to stimulating community interest in socially relevant issues, performance poetry also promotes peer-to-peer camaraderie and social relationships through
critical reflection and exchange of ideas. This in turn encourages greater community mobilization and cohesion around an issue of importance (Pietrzyk, 2009; Valente & Bharath, 1999). For both performers and communities, performance poetry serves as a vehicle to disseminate information, dispel misinformation and myths that may be common to a local setting, and provide educational messages about transmission and protective barriers (Hovey, Booker, & Seligman, 2006; Lichtenstein, 2005; Moyo, 2010; Pietrzyk, 2009).

Performance poetry is well suited for communicating messages within African American communities (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Oral traditions in U.S. black communities have a long history as intergenerational vehicles of expression, from slavery through the Harlem Renaissance, to the Civil Rights movement and current popular culture (Ashe, 2002). Performance poetry, colloquially referred to as spoken word, combines elements of music and literary expression that can appeal to audiences of varying ages, literacy levels, and socioeconomic classes. Given the ability of spoken word to attract large crowds (Chung et al., 2006; Valente & Bharath, 1999) and reach broad audiences at once, this art form circumvents many of the resource challenges that may be present in rural communities. In addition, the process of developing and delivering performance poetry is closely aligned with participatory approaches to addressing health in underserved communities. Developing spoken word within communities builds upon the local expertise and experience, and supports communities in generating local solutions to improving health. Performers who are in and of the community increase the impact of performance poetry, as audiences are more likely to identify with the performer and their message. In addition, in studies with youth poets, students identified with the performers and their experiences based upon similarities in age (McEwan et al., 1991). By building upon local community assets, the development and delivery of poetry builds collective self-efficacy to address HIV/AIDS, and creates a sustainable network to reinforce de-stigmatization and ongoing positive local change. The local investment and enactment of performance poetry promotes long-term sustainability that is similarly seen with other creative and participatory media methods, such as photovoice (Yonas, Burke, Rak, Bennet, Kelly, & Gielen, 2009).

While performance poetry effectively engages individuals and communities in social and health issues, few examples exist in the literature around methods to use it for HIV prevention in rural communities. Here, we describe the development, implementation and evaluation of SWP, an HIV/AIDS pilot intervention in rural North Carolina that aimed to improve HIV-related attitudes and self-efficacy and decrease stigma through the use of performance poetry.

Methods

Study Background

The SWP is a collaborative effort between residents of Edgecombe and Nash Counties of NC and Project GRACE (Growing, Reaching, Advocating for Change and Empowerment), a community based participatory research (CBPR) collaboration aimed at reducing disparities in health in African-American communities. Conversations with community partners in Project GRACE highlighted the need to raise social consciousness and awareness about HIV in the local community, increase individual and collective self-efficacy to prevent HIV/AIDS, facilitate dialogue about HIV, and decrease stigma towards HIV in the local community. Both Edgecombe and Nash counties have three-year HIV disease rates above the state average; Edgecombe at 31.4 and Nash at 17.4 cases per 100,000 (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). In response, Project GRACE and local community members engaged adolescents and adults, who had participated in an HIV prevention intervention, in the SWP. The institutional review board of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill approved this study.

Recruitment and Data Collection

We recruited adolescents and adults who: 1) self-identified as African-American, 2) were living in Edgecombe or Nash counties, and 3) were youth ages 10–17 years or caregivers at least 18 years of age. Recruitment postcards were sent to all eligible participants who had previously participated in another HIV prevention project, and consent was obtained before the project began. The SWP consisted of two phases: spoken word training and spoken word performances.

Spoken Word Training

The materials for the SWP drew from curricula previously developed for photovoice projects and in consultation with spoken word poets. Training sessions were led by trained facilitators and co-facilitators selected by Project GRACE’s community partners. All facilitators were trained poets with prior experience in performance poetry.
Additionally, we recruited four guest poets from diverse geographic regions, representing a range of performance styles and genres. The guest poets also served as a motivational force for participants in the poetry-forming process. Adolescents and adults participated in six three-hour sessions held at a local community hospital, one of the partners in Project GRACE. Transportation to and from the program was provided along with a $10 cash incentive for each of the six training sessions. Each session was designed to prepare participants to deliver a spoken word piece during a local showcase and a regional showcase on World AIDS Day.

The training sessions employed Freire’s (1973, 1993) theory of critical consciousness to support individual and community understanding of the root causes of HIV/AIDS and in turn build self-efficacious behavior. We supported participants in matriculating through three stages: 1) apathy, where participants begin to care about the problem through discussion with facilitators, peers and trained poets, 2) social responsibility, where participants engaged with others directly affected by the social issue to gain a sense of empathy, and 3) action, where participants were armed with skills to produce influential change in their communities (Wallerstein & Berstein, 1998).

Six session topics were chosen: (1) Introduction to Spoken Word; (2) What HIV/AIDS Means to Me; (3) How HIV/AIDS Has Affected My Community; (4) What My Community Can Do to Prevent HIV/AIDS; (5) Spoken Word — Putting It All Together; and (6) Community, advocacy, and spoken word (see Table 1).

The first training session introduced participants to the performance poetry art form and how it can work as an advocacy and awareness tool within their communities. The next three sessions focused on eliciting participants’ local experiences with HIV and guided participants in creating their own spoken word pieces. The fifth session gave participants the opportunity to plan a showcase to feature each participant’s piece, using a video recording of a previous spoken word showcase as an example. The sixth session focused on advocacy and creating solutions for community issues through the use of poetry, and rehearsal for the showcase performances.

During the first session, participants received a journal to record their thoughts and assignments, and to facilitate the writing process for the poetry. Each spoken word training session was designed and facilitated using WORD (Write, Our, Relating, Do), which is an adapted form of the SHOWED method that is commonly used in photovoice (Gubrium & Torres, 2013; Kubicek, Beyer, Weiss, & Kipke, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). WORD guides participants through a process of posing problems and critical thinking by using group dialogue and writing exercises. WORD answers these questions: What can we write down about what is happening in this community related to HIV? How does HIV relate to our lives and how does the issue make us and others feel? How can I explain my feelings to others in a way that they can related to my emotions about the issues surrounding HIV? How can I use spoken word to demonstrate what others can DO to improve HIV awareness and attitudes, decrease stigma, and promote community mobilization? Before starting the WORD process, each group listened to and experienced a performance poetry piece, presented by a guest poet. Following the WORD process, participants received a homework assignment to create their own poetry around the topics discussed during each session. To assist participants in developing the poetry pieces, the group engaged in a brainstorming session to generate words and ideas that could be used in their poetry. However, due to limited literacy in the adult class, the facilitator guided the group in the development of one group poem instead of individual poems. After the fifth session, each participant selected one of the pieces they developed during training to deliver during the showcases.

Spoken Word Performances

The SWP participated in one local and one regional showcase for the participants to deliver their performance poetry pieces. For the local showcase, participants created an invitation list of community members, elected officials, family and friends. Based upon discussion during the training sessions, participants also decided on the color scheme, attire, decorations, and program for the showcase. Publicity for the showcase included a press release and advertisements in a local newspaper. On the day of the local showcase, participants completed a practice performance of their poems before performing live. The facilitators served as Mistresses of Ceremony introducing each poet (participant) and the title of their poem. Each poem was intended to raise awareness about HIV, dispel stigma, and advocate for change in the community around the issue of HIV. For the regional showcase, the SWP participants opened the program with their poetry pieces, followed by performances by a nationally renowned...
Data Collection and Management

**Outcome evaluation.** Participants in the SWP completed self-administered pre- and post-test surveys at the beginning and end of the entire training program. The survey included three domains: self-efficacy, attitudes and beliefs, and stigma. The 9-item collective/individual self-efficacy domain, which was comprised of items adapted from Chung, Jones, Corbett, Booker, Wells, and Collins (2009) and the study team, measured one’s ability to address the burden of HIV/AIDS within one’s community, both individually and collectively. Example items include, “I feel comfortable talking about HIV/AIDS” and “I feel that I have the ability to make change in my community.” The 13-item attitudes and beliefs domain, comprised of items adapted from Chung et al. (2009), measured one’s beliefs and attitudes about issues related to HIV/AIDS. Examples from this domain include “I think HIV/AIDS is an important issue in my community” and “I think poetry is a better way to teach people than lecturing them about HIV/AIDS.” The 13-item stigma domain, comprised of items adapted from Chung et al. (2009) and Van Rie, Sengupta, Pungrassami, Balthip, Choonuan, Kasetjaroen, Strauss, and Chongsuvivatwong (2008), measured negative thoughts associated with HIV/AIDS.

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**Table 1. Spoken Word Training Components**

| Session 1: Introduction to Spoken Word | • Define Spoken Word  
 • How to use Spoken word as an advocacy tool  
 • Explain the use of journals  
 • Identify the week’s themes | • Overview, introductions, and ice breaker  
 • Ground rules and expectations  
 • Poet facilitator performances  
 • Brainstorm Session: What is Spoken Word?  
 • Journal exercise |
|---|---|---|
| Session 2: What HIV/AIDS Means to Me | • Understand what HIV/AIDS means to them  
 • Present poems from session one  
 • Brainstorm key themes and phrases  
 • Craft their own piece | • Revisit ground rules, icebreaker session  
 • Participants perform poems from previous session journal exercise  
 • Guest poet performance and dialogue  
 • Journal response to poet performance  
 • Introduction of WORD discussion format  
 • Brainstorm Session: Develop themes based upon the session topic  
 • Small group exercise: Poetry development using words and theme identified during the brainstorming session  
 • Group performance |
| Session 3: How HIV/AIDS Has Affected My Community | • Understand how HIV/AIDS has affected participants and their communities  
 • Express views on topic in poetry form  
 • Identify the week’s journaling assignment | • Revisit ground rules, icebreaker session  
 • Overview, introductions, and ice breaker  
 • Revisit themes discussed over past sessions  
 • Small group exercise: practice performance |
| Session 4: What My Community and I Can Do to Prevent HIV/AIDS | • Understand what participants and their communities can do to prevent HIV/AIDS  
 • Express views on topic in poetry form  
 • Identify the week’s journaling assignment | • Revisit ground rules, icebreaker session  
 • Showcase planning (establish planning committee, goals, messages for policymakers and community members)  
 • Revisit themes discussed over past sessions  
 • Small group exercise: practice performance |
| Session 5: Putting It All Together | • Plan the Spoken Word Showcase | • Revisit ground rules, icebreaker session  
 • Showcase planning (establish planning committee, goals, messages for policymakers and community members)  
 • Revisit themes discussed over past sessions  
 • Small group exercise: practice performance |
| Session 6: Community, Advocacy and HIV/AIDS | • Define advocacy and provide examples  
 • Explore social forces that drive change  
 • Understand the importance of youth’s role in advocacy  
 • Rehearse pieces | • Demonstrate examples of individual advocacy  
 • Discuss the importance of advocacy messages  
 • Small group exercise: Present an advocacy example and discuss the meaning of the word community  
 • Practice Spoken Word performance |
Examples from the stigma domain include “People with HIV/AIDS should not play with other people’s children” and “I view people with HIV/AIDS as unclean.” All the domain-specific responses were structured using a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree).

For the showcases, we asked all attendees to complete self-administered pre- and post-test surveys that included 7 items from the self-efficacy domain, 8 items from the attitudes and beliefs domain, and all 13 items from the stigma domain. Showcase responses also used a 5-point Likert rating scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

**Process evaluation.** In addition, SWP participants evaluated each training session. Participants' responses were rated on a 5-point rating scale (1=very poor to 5=excellent). Following each training session, staff from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, also members of Project GRACE, led a structured debriefing session with the facilitator and co-facilitator to discuss any process or emergent issues from the session. Debriefing sessions lasted no longer than 30 minutes. An independent reviewer crosschecked the transcripts to ensure accuracy. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the transcript. Immediately following the fifth youth session, we also conducted a focus group and gathered information about youth perceptions of the process and impact of the SWP experience. Focus group questions further explored the concepts included in the process evaluation (e.g. perception of the guest poets, likes and dislike about the program content and structure, and perceived benefits and barriers to SWP participation, etc.). The focus group session, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Data Analysis**

We used IBM SPSS Statistics 21© software for statistical analysis and reporting. The final sample excluded individuals if they had missing data. The participants’ demographic characteristics and self-reported information were described using frequencies, means and percentages. A paired-sample t-test was used to examine whether change in the self-efficacy, attitudes and beliefs, and stigma scores (pre to post) differs significantly from zero. All other data were summarized using descriptive statistics such as means, medians, proportions, and standard errors, with 95% confidence intervals. The statistical significance for all analyses was based on the conventional alpha level of significance of 0.05.

For the debriefings and focus group, two team members reviewed the transcripts independently to familiarize themselves with the data, and identify conceptual patterns and groupings of the text, commonly referred to as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were shared with the research team, including the facilitators, for verification of the themes.

**Results**

**Demographic Characteristics**

A total of 15 individuals (adult n = 7, 47%; youth n=8, 53%) participated in the spoken word training sessions. All participants were African Americans and more than half (n = 9) were males (see Table 2). The showcase attendees were primarily African American (77.8%) and most had at least some college-level education (64.4%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Characteristics</th>
<th>Participants N (15)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Audience N (33)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School or GED</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical School Training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree or More</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused to Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Totals do not sum to the sample size due to missing data.*
Impact of SWP Training on Participants

All 15 participants (100%) completed the overall pre-test survey and 14 participants (93.3%) completed the overall post-test survey. In general, participants in the SWP training demonstrated improvement in self-efficacy and reduced stigma towards HIV, while attitudes and beliefs remained relatively unchanged (see Table 3).

The overall domain-specific mean for self-efficacy increased from 3.19 at pre-test to 4.44 at post-test, though this difference was not statistically significant. However, two individual items in the self-efficacy domain showed statistically significant improvement – I know how to talk to my community about HIV/AIDS (p<0.05) and I think about how my surroundings are connected to HIV/AIDS in my community (p<0.05). For attitudes and beliefs towards HIV/AIDS, the overall domain-specific mean decreased from 4.21 at the pre-test level to 4.16 at the post-level, though the mean difference of -0.42 was not statistically significant. None of the mean ratings for individual attitude and belief items were different between pre and post-test surveys at a level of statistical significance. For stigma, the overall domain-specific mean decreased from 2.72 at the pre-test level to 2.46 at the post-test level, indicating an improvement in stigma scores. While the overall mean difference for stigma was not statistically significant, two individual items showed statistically significant results—People with HIV/AIDS should not play with other people’s children and I would want to keep my distance from people with HIV/AIDS (p<0.05).

**SWP Training Process Feedback**

On the training evaluation surveys, participants indicated that all sessions were either good or excellent (see Table 4). Specifically, sessions received a rating of 4 or higher, indicating that participants believed that sessions provided clear examples, facilitated a better understanding and application of spoken word in their performance poetry pieces.

---

**Table 3. Pre-Post Mean Differences in the Spoken Word Project, NC 2012**

**Participant Training Outcomes* (n=14)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Pre X</th>
<th>Post X</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective/Individual Self-Efficacy (8 items)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of what SW means</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of ways to create my own SW</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was provided clear examples of ways to write a SW piece</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.009*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After today, I understand more about performance poetry</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any questions I had were clearly answered</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma (13 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with HIV/AIDS should not play with other people’s children</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would want to keep my distance from people with HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.009*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Training Session Evaluation Outcomes — Mean Ratings* in the Spoken Word Project, NC 2012**

**Session 1 Introduction to Spoken Word**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.862</td>
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<td>4.54</td>
<td>.660</td>
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<td>4.46</td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.927</td>
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</table>

**Sessions 2-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Session 6 Community, Advocacy, and HIV/AIDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.975</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>.842</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Session attendance varied across the sessions, ranging from 11–13 participants; responses ranged from 1–5.
and facilitated better understanding of the journaling assignments. They also rated discussions during each session as helping them think through the issues [related to HIV/AIDS] (mean > 4.0) and felt that the facilitators/co-facilitators answered all their questions clearly, making the sessions enjoyable to attend (mean > 4). After training session 6, participants reported that they were confident in carrying out their assigned tasks for the community during spoken word showcase exhibits (mean = 4.2).

Participants offered positive feedback, as well as opportunities to improve the Spoken Word Program. Overall, youth participants appreciated the peer-to-peer learning environment. Youth participants noted, “I like being in an environment with people around my own age”, “My friends want to see me perform” and “It [spoken word training] builds your confidence”. Facilitators noted during debriefings that working in small groups gave both youth and adult participants an opportunity to receive constructive feedback on poetry efforts, to work together to brainstorm themes and ideas outlined during training sessions, and learn from each other’s poetry styles.

Most of the participants had no previous experience performing spoken word. Facilitators noted the benefit of audio-video examples of previous showcases that “worked well and helped as a reference point.” For participants with limited exposure to spoken word, “asking them to come up with something they’ve never done is hard and asking them to decide how [to develop performance poetry] would have been an issue. The video was very helpful.” In addition, the diversity of guest poets enhanced the training experience as youth participants described the poets as “inspiring” and offering “different experiences to draw from”.

Youth also described challenges to participation that included a desire for more incentive money, conflicts with the day of the week the sessions were held (six consecutive Saturdays), and the burden of completing evaluations. While engaging participants in the planning of the showcases was meant to foster ownership and empowerment for participants, some facilitators noted challenges with participant’s ability to plan a public event. Given the wide range of cognitive and literacy abilities of participants, facilitators observed opportunities to modify some of the language used in the training and the strategies used for delivering the information. Specifically, one facilitator noted difficulty among adult participants with lower functional literacy in developing spoken word and the need for more practical examples to support the adult’s creative process. Adults also needed more affirmation to be comfortable performing spoken word.

Overall, facilitators noted that participation in the training and showcase experience helped youth participants with their performance poetry skills as “they recognized rhythm, rhyme, tone, sound, movement and discussed posture and how it can keep or lose your audience.” As a result of participating in the spoken word training, youth participants expressed that they “understand they have a voice in the community.”

**Themes of Spoken Word Poetry**

The SWP participants developed a total of 36 poems during the spoken word training and chose 14 of those to perform for the showcase. Participants used poetry to cover a range of themes related to HIV. As part of the apathy stage of the SWP training, over half (8 out of 14) of the individuals described risk behaviors that contribute to risk for acquiring HIV; ranging from using “dirty needles” and having unprotected sex to not getting an HIV test and being unaware of one’s sero-status. Consistent with the “action” stage of the SWP training, most (6 out of 8) of these individuals also offered strategies to individuals to protect themselves from HIV infection by “being aware”, using clean needles, and practicing sexual abstinence. Half of the participants (7 out of 14) reflected the “apathy” stage of training through their focus on the personal experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and the impact of HIV on PLWHA’s significant others. Participants referred to the loss of friends who died from AIDS, the need for PLWHA to take pills every day, and even the pain of mothers seeing their children cope with living with HIV. One participant’s poem described the sexual risk behaviors that can lead to HIV infection, the personal awareness of becoming infected, and issued a warning to other members of the community to encourage others not to become infected:

```
I woke up this morning, happy as I could be, 
not knowing that I had HIV. 
It is something that I did not want to happen to me. 
My mother warned me, “Son, be careful out there because of HIV, 
it is easy to get,” but I did not listen. 
I know the things that I didn’t do: 
I know I got caught up with me using bad needles that weren’t cleaned,
```
having sex with every woman that gave it up free with no protection thinking that I didn’t need it [protection].

Feeling bad and saying, “Man, it couldn’t have been me, taking pills everyday though saying to myself, ‘What can I do?’”

I heard a voice say, “Pray, and I’ll pray for you.”

So remember, people, don’t do what I did!

Using needles that wasn’t cleaned.

Laying with every woman that give it up free.

If you do that, you won’t catch HIV.

Oh my God, it happened to me!

Two participants spoke directly to the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, and one described the subsequent need for communities to “respect those with HIV.” Several participants incorporated faith principles as part of the coping experience for PLWHA, and described “God watching over those with HIV” and “His love and strength” helping PLWHA to cope. Interestingly, a couple of participants also noted the critical role of PLWHA in generating apathy by sharing their personal experiences with others, and demonstrating their stories of perseverance and survival. As part of their social responsibility, some participants also used their poetry to describe action steps that individuals within the community can take to promote HIV prevention (i.e. be a community spokesperson, get the word out, make your voices heard, do your research, be unified, etc.)

Spoken Word Showcase Outcomes

We reached approximately 200 adults and youth through the national showcase, which took place on World AIDS Day in Raleigh, NC through sponsorship from Black Entertainment Television’s Wrap It Up Campaign. Overall 33 individuals completed the pre and posttests assessments. The self-efficacy of the showcase attendees to address the burden of HIV/AIDS in their community remained relatively unchanged from pre (4.41) to post (4.39) and the difference was not statistically significant. The attendees had very positive attitudes and beliefs towards HIV/AIDS with a mean rating of 4.52 at pre-test, which remained unchanged at the end of the showcase. In assessing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, we found that the mean ratings decreased from 1.72 at the pretest level compared to 1.67 at the posttest level. While this mean difference was not statistically significant, the decrease in mean ratings suggests an overall improvement in attendee’s stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. None of the mean differences for domain-specific individual items were statistically significant.

Discussion

The purpose of the SWP was to facilitate community conversations about HIV/AIDS, to improve self-efficacy, attitudes, and beliefs about HIV, and to reduce stigma within a rural community. Participant representatives and other stakeholders guided the development of the SWP components thereby enhancing shared norms, common values and desire to address a mutual need – HIV prevention. This pilot relied on existing community resources and strengths by recruiting poets, facilitators and co-facilitators for the training sessions from within the community. We built upon the inherent social relationships and experiences within a rural community by involving community members, academic researchers, community organizations and local public officials in supporting community dialogue and decreasing stigma around a significant health concern identified by members of this community: HIV/AIDS.

Artistic forms of expression have often been used to identify issues of concern to a community and their use has the potential to lead performers, as well as their audiences, through a process that promotes social change (Fliegel 2005). The participants in the SWP appeared to move through the process of critical consciousness, which has been described as a process through which marginalized individuals interpret their social conditions and consider ways in which they could respond that might facilitate change (Freire, 1973, 1993). As demonstrated in other community interventions that utilized creative forms for expression, through poetry, performers in the SWP were able to engage with the issue of HIV in their communities and both performers and their audience were able to reflect on their role in addressing it (Gray, Oré de Boehm, Farnsworth, & Wolf, 2010).

The demonstrated effect of the Spoken Word Project is similar to other applications of CBPR and the arts. For example, researchers using photovoice have successfully created “voice” among rural populations to tell their stories in their own words, and shifted participant roles from learners to teachers in their communities (Gubrium & Torres, 2013; Kubicek et al., 2012;
Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). The use of narratives and the transition of community members to leaders is necessary to bridge communication with local policymakers who develop governance for HIV prevention and treatment services. For both showcases, participants invited and shared their perspectives with influential people to whom they might not normally have access. Previous research has also suggested that poetry, in particular, can be a powerful means to allow groups that have been marginalized to express their perspectives and engender empathy for their concerns (Nyamathi, Slagle, Thomas, Hudson, Kahilifard, Avila, Orser, & Cuchilla, M. 2011).

The SWP demonstrated benefits for both participants and the local community by improving some aspects of self-efficacy among participants and reducing HIV-related stigma among both participants and showcase attendees. These findings indicate that performance poetry may be an effective vehicle to raise awareness about HIV and support individuals to take action to address HIV associated stigma in their communities. The preliminary effectiveness of the SWP rested in its ability to effectively train local youth and adults to deliver messages using an innovative, culturally relevant, and sustainable approach. Consistent with this idea, others have shown that HIV interventions that are interactive by design, including those employing small groups and community-level engagement, have been shown to be the most effective in facilitating behavioral change and risk reduction (Albarracin et al. 2005).

In addition to local performers, a contributing factor to the success of this intervention included the participation of the facilitators and co-facilitators, who were trained poets and selected by GRACE community partners. Other studies demonstrate that community-engaged interventions tend to be more successful when the facilitators share characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, and other demographic factors, with participants and target consumers, as was the case with the SWP (Crepaz et al., 2006). In addition, community-based interventions often face the challenge of sustainability (Minker, 2005); however, by building a cadre of local spoken word trainers and performers, SWP helped to create a local resource for continued community conversations to support HIV prevention and further reduce the local stigma surrounding HIV.

Despite the overall success of SWP, there were some limitations. First, we experienced significant challenges with collecting data during the course of the showcases. In order not to disrupt the flow of the arrivals, only attendees who visited the project table during the pre-show exposition had the opportunity to complete the pre and post assessments. In addition, participants that arrived close to the start of the showcase or late were unable to participate in data collection. This logistical challenge limited our ability to determine effects of the SWP among attendees. Second, self-efficacy, attitudes and beliefs among showcase attendees completing the pre and posttest surveys were relatively high at pretest, which left little room for improvement (i.e., ceiling effect). It is also possible that attendees who self-selected into data collection may be more interested in and sensitive to the issues surrounding HIV within this rural community. Completion of the pre and posttest survey among a broader range of attendees may have presented a better understanding of community measures prior to and after participation in a spoken word showcase. In addition, we recruited the participants from a previous HIV prevention study – Teach One Reach One project. As a result, spoken word participants began the training with largely favorable attitudes and beliefs towards HIV/AIDS at the pre-test level, here again a possible ceiling effect. Future applications of spoken word in community settings will need to ensure participation by individuals that represent a broader cross-section of the community.

While the SWP was designed as an intergenerational training, facilitators noted challenges to developing performance poetry that were specific to adult participants. The opportunity to stimulate dialogue around HIV/AIDS prevention is clearly beneficial across all age groups; however, youth in this setting may feel more comfortable using the arts to facilitate community conversations. In addition, both counties have fewer residents with at least a high school education than is reported for the state overall (84.1% compared to 77.9% and 81.9%, respectively), which may explain some of the challenges with literacy that we encountered with adult participants. We felt it was important to make sure all voices were heard and made modifications to help individuals translate their ideas into individual written pieces. Given the strength of performance poetry as an oral art form, it may be particularly important that future programs employ activities and assignments that rely less on written formats (i.e., use of audio recording, videos, etc.) so that those most affected by health inequities can participate fully.

Performance poetry builds upon local context and resources, generates community reflection and
mental imagery regarding a health issue, and engages a broad spectrum of performers and audiences. Our findings show that the effect of stigma and limited community conversations about HIV in rural communities can be abated through the use of spoken word. As a form of performance poetry, spoken word provides channels of communication and benefits for those directly engaged in training and those who attend performances. As a strategy that leverages local experiences and capacity, performance poetry is a promising approach to raise HIV awareness, promote community conversations, and improve stigma in rural African American communities.

References


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Informing 4-H Youth Development in Southeast Alaska Native Villages

Debra Jones and Linda Skogrand

Abstract
This qualitative study explored the research question, What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H youth development respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? The study offers initial findings regarding concerns about youth and shares Alaska Native voices and perspectives in how we can best deliver youth programming in remote rural villages in culturally responsive ways. Participants highlight the importance of establishing programs within the context of culture, language and spirituality, engaging youth in activities that give them a sense of purpose and belonging, and promoting youth leadership. Implications are shared for development of culturally responsive youth programming which may be applicable with similar populations within and outside of Alaska.

Introduction
The Cooperative Extension Service offers 4-H youth development programming throughout the United States, being the nation’s largest youth development organization and implementing community-wide change at an early age (National 4-H Council, n.d.). This informal learning is typically delivered through parents and other community volunteers learning together with youth through youth-adult partnerships. Alaska 4-H has had intermittent presence in remote rural communities since 1930. As one of the authors of this study returned to Alaska 4-H in 2009, she met individuals who shared stories of 4-H when they were growing up and how they wished it was available for youth in their villages. In response to this, we began inviting those interested to sit down and have conversations with us. We found that people were quite willing to share their thoughts and ideas. These Alaska Native leaders responded to having a voice in developing something positive for youth. The overarching research question which drove this inquiry was: What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? This study offers initial findings regarding concerns about youth in Southeast Alaska villages and requests for 4-H programming. It shares Alaska Native voices and perspectives in how we can best deliver 4-H in remote villages in Southeast Alaska in culturally responsive ways.

The current study invited the guidance of adults as they will be the ones to provide safe places for youth to engage in informal learning activities. Historically, relationships are not easily made between outsiders and residents of remote Alaska villages and, unfortunately, many programs which are offered are not sustained. In many cases, adults, much less youth, are not invited to share their thoughts on potential new programs being offered in their communities.

4-H provides a flexible programming structure which is responsive to tribal contexts as it is largely driven by members of the local community. Youth thrive as they learn together with caring adults who will listen to and mentor them as they develop to their full potential. 4-H provides a safe place for youth to learn and have fun together while they develop greater understanding of self and their place in the world. 4-H also provides a strong connection to suicide prevention by offering youth opportunities to experience a sense of belonging within a caring community of peers and adults within their local community and beyond.

A national longitudinal study (file:///Users/CCBPgrad/Downloads/13105NFRH_PosYouthDeveReport_v13%20(1).pdf) revealed that youth in 4-H were less likely than other youth to experience depression and risky behaviors such as alcohol and tobacco use, and importantly, this influence appears to become stronger as children grow older. 4-H youth exhibited greater emotional engagement in school, achieved higher grades in school, were nearly two times more likely to see themselves going to college, and exhibited greater confidence in their ability to get and keep a part time job. Fifty-six percent were more likely to spend time exercising and being physically active, had higher self-esteem and communication skills, and were three times more likely to contribute to their communities than youth who did not have a 4-H experience.

Suicide is pervasive among Alaska Native youth. It is the leading cause of death for 15-19
year olds in Northwest Alaska, and statistics of this magnitude are unfortunately similar for other areas of the state (Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Juneau Suicide Prevention, n.d.). According to the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (2010), Alaskan high school students think about suicide or attempt suicide at rates far higher than the national average. As we reviewed the literature, we quickly found that our inquiry reflected research with Alaska Native communities which indicates connectedness with family, community, and the natural environment is a protective factor for suicide, through its development of a sense of purpose and meaning in one’s life (Mohatt, Fok, Burket, Henry, & Allen, 2011). As the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan (2010) states, the time is now to “… mend the net of services and supports in place to prevent suicide…in a way that promotes physical, emotional, and mental wellness and strengthens personal and community resilience” (p. 3). There is a common conception that the role of youth development programs is to develop future leaders. Although that is one outcome, it is our contention that youth also need to be recognized and valued for who they are during childhood and adolescence and not just for the future adults they will become. Likewise, the Suicide Prevention Council (2010) emphasizes the value of youth programming that focuses “on the positive aspects of life and hopefulness” (p. 23), while the 2010 Statewide Suicide Prevention Summit recognized the power of Alaskan youth as one of the state’s greatest strengths.

It is clear that 4-H can provide a vehicle for supporting youth in Alaska Native villages. Therefore, information gathered from this study will be utilized to inform development of 4-H positive youth development programming in remote rural Alaska villages which have indicated an interest in 4-H for their youth and families. We realize that the diversity among tribes and language groups precludes a cookie-cutter approach to tribal youth programming. Results of the study will not only inform youth programming but also collect foundational information about how Alaska Native leaders perceive the state of youth and their needs within their home village.

This study was conducted from the perspective of multicultural feminist theory (Tong, 2009). Multiculturalism focuses on people being encouraged to maintain their ethnic pride. The feminist component of the theory is that we hear the voices of those not typically heard. This study, therefore, was conducted from the perspective that we need to hear the voices of Alaska Natives in how 4-H can best serve the needs of youth and their families; thereby reflecting and reinforcing ethnic pride.

Data analysis led us to hearing these voices through a lens of social exclusion theory. Social exclusion has been described as a concept in which individuals are excluded from fully participating in normal activities of society (Sen, 2000). The concept goes even deeper in remote rural Alaska as individuals feel a sense of exclusion not only from the normal activities of their local community but from the rest of the state, and society in general. In a vast geographic area with very few roads, many Alaska youth and young adults lack basic life skills and opportunities necessary to be productive members of their communities. Many youth suffer social and emotional exclusion. The pain these youth feel is real. Although it is understood that social exclusion affects emotional regulation in how one acts and reacts to others, research also reveals that social exclusion can lead to poor decision-making and diminished ability to learn (Campbell, Krusemark, Dyckman, Brunell, McDowell, Twenge, & Clementz, 2006).

**Methods**

Just as we acknowledge a culturally responsive approach in developing and implementing a youth program, we acknowledged a culturally responsive approach and ways of knowing throughout the research study. To this end, we invited people to share with us what they saw and what they felt was needed for youth of their village. Being culturally responsive also guides us to share what we are learning in ways such that it can be utilized both within and outside of academia for practical application in communities who wish to improve the condition of youth. What we present are peoples’ stories about what youth need in their respective communities and these stories will be used for change they wish to see in their communities. As Carson and Hand stated (1999, p. 161), “Native Americans have been studied more than any other group … yet they remain among the most disadvantaged groups within the United States.” Being cognizant of a long history of distrust of outsiders conducting studies in Alaska Native communities, we invited participation of leaders in the research process. These leaders began by helping us develop the interview questions. They also helped us as we wrote the results and they contributed to the discussion. Their involvement was particularly important when findings reflected
negatively upon communities. The Alaska Native leaders encouraged us to report the findings as the data described the lives of youth in the villages even if it painted a negative view of life.

This study was qualitative in design which is consistent with indigenous cultural values (LaFrance, 2004) and brings to light individual interpretation and meaning. A purposeful sampling technique (Creswell, 2013) was used to select ten adults to be interviewed from Southeast Alaskan villages. These adults had lived and/or were currently living in these areas and had intimate knowledge of the culture in these villages. The basis of the conversations was to give us a sense of what communities looked like and felt like, and to better situate a positive youth development program in various contexts so that the programs could be meaningful and make sense to those involved.

The research question guiding our inquiry was: What are the needs of youth in Southeast Alaska Native villages and how can 4-H respond to these needs in culturally responsive ways? A set of interview questions was developed and revised from initial listening sessions and reviewed through email inquiries and responses with Alaska Native leaders. Interview questions addressed three broad areas: 1) What are existing concerns with youth in villages? 2) What do youth need to be healthy? 3) What should programming look like? Interviews, on average, were about 45 minutes long and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These interviews were conducted in the Southeast region of Alaska in locations convenient to participants.

Analysis of the data was done in a way suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) in that researchers developed coding categories reflective of the themes described by the participants. When the researchers identified differences in the coding categories, they went back to the data and developed a consensus about which categories best reflected the participants’ responses. The findings were shared with participants and they have indicated the findings are culturally accurate.

Demographics

Participants consisted of five females and five males. Of the females, four were Alaska Native and one American Indian from the lower 48 who was living in Alaska and working with a tribal government. One Alaska Native female was raised in the village, left for college, remained in the urban setting, and is actively working with Native organizations. Another left the village for college, returned to raise a family, and is working with tribal government. One other has spent her life in the village and is also actively working with tribal government. The final female participant spent her life in a more urban area of the state with family ties to the village.

Two of the five males were Alaska Native, with one spending his life in a more urban area of the state with family ties to the village, and working with a Native Corporation serving youth and families, and the other, a young adult male who grew up in the village, left for work for a period of time, and moved back to the village to raise his family. Two males moved to the village through marriage with a 20+ year history within the community. The final male participant was an Alaska Native with a family connection to the village who spent his life in a more urban setting and is working with a Native Corporation serving youth and families.

Findings

Three major themes resulted in analyzing the data which were consistent with the research questions. These themes included existing concerns with youth in villages, what youth need to be healthy, and what youth programming should look like. A brief description of each theme follows with quotes from participants to illustrate the themes.

Existing Concerns with Youth in the Villages

There were two major areas of concern about youth in the villages. Participants talked about drugs and alcohol and gave some indication about reasons why youth turned to drugs and alcohol. Secondly, they indicated there was very little for youth to do in the villages, especially in the summer. Participants shared with us their concerns about youth in the village such as few meaningful activities for youth and youth with no vision for their future. Adults worry about the mental and physical health of their youth amidst unhealthy environments of alcoholism, drug use, and physical, and sexual abuse. Trying to cope with these negative influences around them and their own destructive behavior too often results in suicide. Ultimately, they shared that it is time to step up to the responsibility to provide healthier environments for youth and that change must start from within their communities.

Drugs and alcohol. All of the participants in the study identified drugs and alcohol as a problem for children in their villages. According to one participant, “I’m seeing a lot of substance abuse. Little kids starting to drink at a really young age.” One participant felt that, “They don’t know about
the risks that drugs have.”

The participants in this study also gave clues about why children use drugs and alcohol. One person said:

I think a lot of kids turn to drugs because they see their parents doing it, they see their friends doing it. It’s an escape for them. It’s a way to escape reality for a little while—to numb that pain.

Others alluded to where the pain might come from. One person described the unhealthy relationships their parents might have, which causes stress for young people. Someone referring to the abuse of children in villages said, “Other types of abuse that are major issues in rural Alaska … I think some of those lead to drug and alcohol abuse.” One person did not elaborate but stated, “There are a lot of bad things going on.” There were comments made about children “feeling neglected” and children “don’t seem to get the love and affection they need.” Another participant said children, grow up in homes where there’s a lot of alcohol and abuse.” One participant indicated that alcohol was in four out of five homes in their village.

Finally, someone referred to the high suicide rate among youth and young adults. This participant said some adults cannot cope, so how would youth who are 10, 12, or 14 years old cope with these things. The result is that some individuals, along with using drugs and alcohol, also commit suicide.

Few meaningful activities. Several of the participants described the lack of things to do in the villages. Participants said, “There are a lot of kids who sit inside all day and play video games,” and as a result, “Kids mope around saying there’s nothing to do.” This was especially true in the summer when they were not in school. A reality of village life is that in most instances not only do schools close for the summer but teachers also leave for the summer. There were several references to youth enjoying basketball and they could play during the school year, but the schools were closed during the summer. One person made reference to lack of parental encouragement for kids to be involved in activities. One participant described, generally, the lack of opportunities for youth in villages. She said, “Like in Juneau … they have swimming pools, ice skating rinks, all kinds of stuff. In the villages they don’t have things like that.”

What Youth Need to Be Healthy

Participants described what a healthy young person looked like, such as having positive self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, being spiritual, being proud of who they are, and knowing about their culture. They also talked about healthy youth having healthy relationships and being able to trust those around them, including people in helping professions. As one participant said, being healthy is, “knowing about their culture and where they came from and being proud of themselves. To me that is a healthy young person.”

Participants said to be healthy, youth needed to know the traditional skills such as hunting and fishing, and how to stay safe doing those things. They needed to know about their culture, language, and spirituality.

Traditional Skills

Many of the participants said there was a lack of activities for youth in the villages and they needed positive things to do. Participants then elaborated on what those things should be with the most often cited as learning traditional skills—things that were done in the Native way.

The majority of participants identified hunting and fishing and learning to live off the land as important skills young people should know to be healthy. Sometimes these skills were learned in culture camp which was usually one week during the summer. These skills, however, could also be learned in an ongoing way, throughout the year, through youth programs.

One participant reflected on her own upbringing when she talked about her father who would “… take me fishing, he’d take me hunting. We’d go and collect seaweed. He could relate to the Native way of life.” Although many youth are old enough to fish in boats, many are too young. These younger children, however, “… can bring up local foods from the beach such as seaweed, clams, gumboots, and maybe even fish.” According to one participant, there was also a need to “teach kids how to smoke fish. … subsistence is a good thing.”

There was a resulting need to teach youth about water safety, since many of the villages are on major rivers or ocean inlets and fishing was part of living off the land. Another participant also talked about the importance of learning survival skills as they learned to live off the land. A story was told about how one young man who had lost the motor on his boat far from shore, but along with others in the boat was able to paddle to shore far from the village.
They paddled to shore, they hunkered down and built a shelter and they rationed their food… . And when the coast guard finally came and found him they were in great shape. They had all kinds of food, they had firewood, they had a shelter, and they were set.

The survival course he had taken two weeks before helped them survive; however, most kids do not have those skills and could benefit from learning them.

Most participants talked about sharing food with others in the village as being an important part of the food gathering experience. One participant said it was important for youth to do things for themselves, rather than having things given to them. The participant said, “… hunting and fishing, that’s why so many kids do that, even berry picking. They go pick berries for their grandparents.” Another participant said that many youth gathered their Native food and, “They distribute them to the elders. I know they go to the senior center and I know that makes them feel good.” One participant suggested having fishing derbies, so youth could develop fishing skills and they would share the fish with their families.

Culture, language, and spirituality. The majority of the participants indicated that culture, language, and spirituality were important for youth to know about to be healthy. Some participants identified only one of these, but most described more than one or all three. For example, one participant said, “You need to know about your culture, and where you came from. You need to learn about your language… . that alone will make [a youth] a healthy person.” This participant went on to describe the importance of spirituality and also defined it:

[Spirituality] is along the lines of just having a positive attitude and just doing things that benefit you and your well-being. To me, that is spiritual, so to speak… . that’s what gets me through the day. It’s not really praising somebody, it’s kind of just respecting myself and finding things in life that make me happy—thinking positively and striving for more.

Other participants talked more specifically about activities that were components of culture. For example, participants identified Native dancing and Native music as being important for youth to experience. They also indicated beading and carving as being important cultural activities.

One participant described a carving activity that had been very successful in the past, “There was a halibut hook carving class… . and it was amazing how many kids were interested in it.” One person summed it up by saying, “Teach them how to go about their way of living.”

Another person described the importance of learning about cultural art, such as basketry, and also being able to sell that product:

One, is they’re learning a cultural art form that made them feel important and provided a cultural relationship. On the second hand, they were able to then sell some of those things in the store so that they could make a little bit of money. It’s really important to provide something to earn something on your own, so it’s not just given to you.

One participant talked about the feeling she had “when singing in our language” and the importance of youth having this opportunity:

Maybe we didn’t know what everything meant, but it just, it really warms your heart … when you hear the music, because even if you don’t know what the words mean, you know it’s your language, it’s your culture, and something in it is just empowering, it’s just heartwarming when you go to a celebration and hear the music and see everybody coming together. It’s just an amazing feeling. It just touches your heart and soul. We’ve been stripped of it and now it’s been given back to us.

What a Program Should Look Like

As participants provided information about what an effective youth program should look like in villages, they described the qualities that were needed in leaders and the kinds of activities that would be effective. Some participants also talked about the need to include mental health issues such as how to deal with abuse, safety, and suicide.

Qualities of leaders. Several of the participants talked about the necessary qualities of people working with a youth program. Some said it should be parents who are positive role models, or to at least get parents involved with what their kids are doing. In the absence of parental interest, other family or community members could serve in this role. One person added, “But somebody else can. Like my cousin… . She had my family and she had our English teacher and our principal.” Another participant described how several people helped in the process of one’s development in positive ways:
[My] family telling me, “Yes, you can do this.” And as far as I knew, I could do a whole lot. And that’s the way I grew up. At some point I figured out, well, I’m not so perfect, but they gave me the confidence that I could excel at anything, and I’ve tried to—and thought I could do it—and generally I did alright. It was because of that ongoing commitment from my family, my mentor—I kept chugging along.

Another person said a leader should:

… embrace the kids that are struggling and tell them not to give up because there are ways and means that they can get through this and constantly remind them, “Hey, did you get that work done for me? You’ve got to get that application in. You want to go to the job corps, and are you almost done?”

Another participant also talked about the need for a leader to support youth:

Sometimes you stand right by them. You stand right by them and go through whatever they’re going through with them, together. Knowing that they have someone by their side to support them … it gives them self-worth. And they feel better about themselves … they have somebody to talk to.

Finally, a participant said, “[They need] people believing in them—positive people in their lives who come just in time.” This same person added that it could be anyone who gives kids the attention they need in their lives, or someone who tells kids, “‘Yes, you can.’ That’s what kids need.”

Other participants also described who the leaders should be. One person said, “You have a stable person. That’s the main thing, that you find someone that’s respected in the village… . Find the right person that everybody can get along with.” People talked about role modeling and good things happening so youth can see they have a choice of more than just negative things around them, “The confident youth grows to adulthood and you’ve broken the cycle.”

It was suggested that older youth need to be engaged in activities which give them a sense of purpose and vision—a sense of belonging. Older youth can develop a sense of purpose as well as leadership skills by teaching younger kids. This sense of belonging and purpose is necessary to successfully navigate through adolescence and envisioning a positive future to which to aspire. Although they would like to have parents involved and serve as positive role models, they shared the challenge in finding safe local leaders. At the core, a youth program should offer a place for kids to be safe, a place to be themselves, and a place to have fun with others. In essence, they need to know that someone cares for them. It was also proposed that youth need to feel safe to speak up about things going on around them, learn how to be safe, and know what resources are available to them and how to access them.

**Kinds of activities.** Several participants indicated children needed to be involved in physical activities. One person indicated that even an hour of fun once a week can add to the health of a child. They said things like:

* * *

I’m always trying to get kids to just get outside and do something.

* * *

Staying active and having somebody to do it with is definitely key.

* * *

I know one thing that’s really popular in the village is sports. Basketball is where it’s at. Most of the villages have a place for them to participate in sports programs.

* * *

The big old list of things that they like doing, like riding, hiking, night hikes, and then they open the gym and some like racquetball tournaments.

Some individuals talked about the need to prepare youth for jobs:

They could explore the fields that are projected to be in their area, or maybe just in Alaska in general. In the future what’s coming down the road in 20 years… . and maybe giving them some career direction and getting them lined up with biology or something where you know there’s a need for Native biologists.

One participant said that activities for older teens needed to be “something that they have a vision for, and a sense of belonging.” It has to relate to “where they want to be and how it relates to their lives.”
Participants also added that activities needed to be interactive and hands on, such as gardening, doing things that get their hands dirty, and doing projects that are short-term so kids did not lose interest. Others concluded that the ideas about specific activities should come from the kids. One participant said, “I think that’s the key—not telling them what we want for them, but getting them to realize what they want for themselves and to have the will and the fortitude to go after it.”

Support positive mental health. A few of the participants referred to the challenges youth experience in the villages. They said things like, “I want them to have a safe place. I think mostly it’s the safety. Be safe and be in a loving atmosphere. Get those positive reactions from people. I don’t see them getting the love and affection they need.” Another said a program might help kids “escape reality.” Others became more specific in saying that youth needed to know about how to respond to abuse, “They need to be able to speak up and say, ‘hey, you know what. I’ve got to get out of here. This is not healthy for me … It’s okay to say what’s going on. It’s OK.” Another went further to suggest:

[They need to know] how to recognize abuse, cycles of abuse, and then how to try to be safe if you’re in that position. How do you get yourself safe if you’re feeling depressed, if somebody in the house is belligerent or threatening. It may not be physical, but mental abuse—to help them recognize it. … Like every morning we talk for a half hour when we get started. “How is it going for you today?” If there’s somebody who’s having a hard time, let’s work it out together to try to solve it… getting them to a safe place and feeling better about themselves.

Another participant added, “At times leaders need to ask, ‘Is everything okay at home?’”

A few of the participants also talked about the need for suicide prevention information being provided to the youth. These participants also connected suicide prevention with helping youth understand their culture. In one village, suicide rates had dropped after they got youth connected to their cultural heritage. We also heard that it’s important to involve youth at a young age. As one person shared:

I know in the villages there’s a lot of negativity going on all the time. And it’s just like any village, when somebody gets ahead the other guys are pulling them back, so just to work with them when they’re younger. I don’t know if you can save them at 19, but the younger kids, if they start young enough that they can have a positive outlook, even no matter what situations they’re in.

Discussion

Participants in this study talked openly about the challenges of youth in the villages and their hope for the future of youth. Social exclusion was evident in the responses of participants. They all spoke openly of alcoholism “and other bad things going on.” They spoke of children “feeling neglected.” The participants also integrated mental health issues into what youth needed. Literature about the well-being of adolescents indicates that a sense of connectedness to others is important as a protection against risky behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, and suicide (Bernat & Resnick, 2009). Wexler and Goodwin (2006) reinforce the importance of youth programs to create youth/adult connections as likely prevention measures to address the alarming rates of youth suicide in Alaska villages. This connectedness or sense of belonging is an essential element of 4-H, which reflects values of Native American youth development based on the medicine wheel (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) as well as values of Alaska Native tribes (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2011). If these needs are met in positive ways, youth are more likely to grow up as adults who contribute and care about themselves, their families, and their communities. If not offered positive ways to meet these needs, youth will find other potentially harmful ways to meet them. The findings of this study, then, suggest the urgent need for youth programs, such as 4-H, where adults work in partnership with youth.

There are implications for what 4-H programming should look like based upon this study.

First, learning activities should be holistic, involving skill development as well as knowledge, and activities should promote healthy lifestyles. Knowledge about dealing with abuse should be included. Second, learning activities should be provided within the context of culture, language, and spirituality to promote ethnic pride. Third, adult leadership needs to be provided by people who are safe, supportive, and can deal with emotional issues of children and youth. As was suggested, even an hour of fun once a week can
add to the health of a child. Youth programming should engage youth in activities which help them feel good about who they are, to have hope for the future, and to see themselves as active participants in their future. Above all, youth need to know that someone cares about them and can help them navigate through life successfully. Of note is that these findings and implications support the goals of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan (2010) for developing healthy lifestyles among Alaska’s youth as stated within the plan, “Mental health promotion is as simple as adding five things to your life: exercise, social connection, acts of giving, self-awareness, and learning (p. 5). The statewide plan also addresses a need for positive role models in the lives of youth, trusted adults providing a source of support and guidance, and a need for youth to be involved in healthy activities such as sports, clubs and cultural activities that promote connectedness (p. 6). 

There are multiple challenges in providing programming addressing the above issues. Adults who work with youth should be from the village or nearby villages so that appropriate cultural values can be taught—values around spirituality, language, and culture. It is also important that parents or other adults are safe for youth to be with and can address content as well as emotional issues. If, in fact, four out of five families experience alcoholism as described by one of the participants in the study, finding adults to provide leadership for 4-H could be challenging. 

Most of the people we talked to grew up in the village and left to go to school. Whether they returned to the village or not, they are now all working in some way to bring services to the communities. We heard them speak of gaining different perspectives which had an impact on their outlook for the future—they saw a different world from that in which they had grown up. This change in perspective which they experienced provides a bit of context to better understand how their vision of healthy youth may become a reality. We have felt some trepidation with the challenge of identifying adults in local communities to take on the role of youth leader/mentor. We may have to rely more heavily on bringing in caring adults from outside of the home village based on what we are hearing, and this may not be a bad thing. Youth in the villages may benefit from having fresh perspectives which are different from what they experience in a small, fairly isolated environment. Healthy relationships with someone outside the village may provide new perspectives for youth to see the good things in their lives and their ability to see themselves in crafting a positive future.

We also heard young adults tell us that they have gone to culture camps for years and, yet, say they do not know their culture. After hearing their stories, we wonder if they really do know their culture but just don’t know they know. There is fear that the ways of the Elders are disappearing and that young adults are not learning the ways of the Elders. We speculate that many may actually know more about their culture than they realize—it just may not be that obvious to them. Adults may need to be challenged to think about what they do know about their culture which can be passed on to youth.

The challenges participants shared are not solely problems of Alaska Native communities in the Southeast but are likely to be problems facing many or all Alaska Native communities. A major finding of this study is that we move beyond identifying and talking about problems to exploring ways to create community capacity through positive youth development. Healthy youth lead to healthy families, which lead to healthy communities. As participants talked and shared with us, they indicated it is time to stop talking and take action. At this crucial point in time, they are concerned that if they do not take action now to make things better for their youth, there may be no hope. They realized that change must start from within their communities. They are concerned about high rates of suicide, child abuse, and domestic violence. These voices shared the darkness of a current reality in hopes that by uncovering the darkness, they will help bring to light solutions for a better future for their children. The Alaska Native leaders who indicated our findings are culturally accurate also indicated that the findings needed to be shared, even though some are negative.

In conclusion, how 4-H programming should look in Southeast Alaska based upon this study may take a variety of forms but should be guided by the implications stated above. Resulting programming should be developed in collaboration with caring adults in the villages and may result in differing models in each village. Recognizing challenges and deficiencies while focusing on positive aspects will serve to bring communities together with a vision for the future. Research findings provide a base of knowledge informing development of culturally responsive youth programming in Southeast Alaska which may also be applicable with similar populations of Alaska Native and Native American youth both within and outside of Alaska.

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Developing a Service-Learning Student Facilitator Program: Lessons Learned

Jerri Kropp, Nancy McBride Arrington, and Veena Shankar

Abstract

The Service-Learning Student Facilitator Program originated from the first author who was engaged in service learning and sought to transform her ideas into a sustainable project that could be reproduced annually. The purpose of this program was to train and certify students as facilitators so that they could assist faculty members in implementing service-learning experiences in their courses in various disciplines across the campus. Student participants became effective leaders of service-learning projects, developed great respect for the methods of service-learning, and expressed a desire for a deeper understanding of its theoretical basis. Their feedback, along with lessons learned, helped shape training in subsequent semesters. These lessons, which are shared, are valuable to those planning to develop similar programs in their universities.

Introduction

The Service-Learning Student Facilitators Program at Georgia Southern University was born from an idea from the first author who was already engaged in service learning and wanted to turn her ideas into a sustainable project that could also be beneficial to other faculty members across campus. As part of a larger service-learning initiative, this program was created to train a cohort of students from our institution that would assist faculty members with their service-learning projects. As a result of the training, these students would be able to speak intelligently about service learning, know the elements that constitute service learning, and manage communications between the classroom, the community partners, and their faculty mentors.

In addition to elucidating our program, the purpose of this article is to provide an overview of service learning, demonstrate how both communities and students benefit from its implementation, explore the history of utilizing student leaders in higher education, and to investigate the effectiveness of training student leaders to serve as facilitators alongside their faculty mentors during service-learning projects.

Service Learning

John Dewey, early 20th century progressive educator, shared beliefs that align with contemporary academic service learning, including that one’s actions directed toward the welfare of others can stimulate both their academic and social development (Dewey, 1938). President Kennedy’s famous words from his inaugural address of 1961 (U.S. Congress, 1989), “…ask not what you can do for yourself, but ask what you can do for your country,” sparked a notion which re-emerged four decades later in the education realm as service learning. Public laws such as The National and Community Service Act (1990) and The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (2009) provide money and encouragement for young people to serve their communities and schools. As a result of these influential acts, many high schools and universities require a service credit for graduation.

Service learning has been defined in many ways. The National Community Service Act of 1990 established the basis of the definitions that are used by various organizations today. The definition adopted for this study resonates with the definition of service learning offered by the Berea College Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CE LTS):

Service Learning is an educational experience based upon a collaborative partnership between the college and the community. Learning through service enables students to apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills to meet genuine community needs. Through reflection and assessment, students gain deeper knowledge of course content and the importance of civic engagement (Berea College, n.d.).

Additionally, this project recognizes and embraces the six key components of service learning that are outlined by Schoenfield (2004). They are: (a) Connection between the service and the learning aspects—not just volunteering; (b) Reflection on personal changes and changes to others; (c) Reciprocity in which the student offers time, ener-
gy, knowledge, and creativity to address a specific need in the community and in turn receives professional advice and direction from the community, mentors, and faculty; (d) Critical thinking in which students utilize reflective and analytical thinking, and in which they develop creative and effective problem solving skills as they work in various situations; (e) Social responsibility as the students’ multicultural environment allows them to expand their compassion and civic awareness; and (f) Experiential learning in which the students learn to take initiative and assume responsibility through their hands-on experiences.

Community Outcomes

Because of limited resources, low population, isolation, and a loss of job opportunities, the schools in many small, rural communities, especially in rural communities, have come to “symbolize the identity and survival” of those communities (Miller, 1997). Youth, through service-learning activities, have been engaged in community planning and development and have contributed to improvements in the environment, such as cleaning up a park or designing a new face for the city square. They have brought the community together through newly-established community shelters focusing on projects aimed at alleviating poverty in the community, tutored children on finances, supported low-income residents by planting a community garden, and organized food drives (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Henness, Ball, & Moncheski, 2013; Miller, 1997). Ross’ (2012) nursing students impacted their elderly community center by providing one-on-one interactions with residents that were not formerly possible, and by bringing new and innovative ideas to provide solutions for issues in the program. In describing the community development approach to service learning, Hennes et al. (2013) note that a sustained focus is desired over a one-shot project in order to make a difference in issues such as hunger, environmental quality and literacy.

Student Learning Outcomes

The move to implement service learning into university coursework is further propelled by the results of numerous studies documenting benefits of service learning. For example, enhancement of student learning outcomes and increased citizenship skills have resulted from participation in service-learning experiences (Ehrlich, 2005; Meaney, Griffin, & Bohler, 2009; Strage, 2000). Insightful reflections on service experiences have contributed to increased self-efficacy, communication skills, and acceptance of cultural diversity (Eyler & Giles, 1997; Lattanzi, Campbell, Dole, & Palombaro, 2011; Sipe, 2001). Schoenfeld (2004) also notes that through service learning, students have opportunity to become self-sufficient and improve deliberative, collaborative, and leadership skills.

With the many benefits of implementing service learning in coursework being validated, many professors are willing to embrace the methodology in their classes. However, one of the primary barriers to faculty members to planning and implementing the service activities is time—an element which is paramount in facilitating the community partnership, preparing the students, and implementing the service.

Several alternative approaches have been implemented to conserve faculty members’ time. For example, one strategy is to use internal community members as potential partners. Using this model at Truman State University (Heckert, 2010), the definition of community is broadened to include staff, administrators, and students. The benefits of providing service to internal community members are that faculty time is preserved, and site problems and transportation issues are avoided. The primary drawback is lack of external connection. Another strategy applied at the same institution, with similar benefits and limitations, is to provide indirect service-learning opportunities in which students develop products/materials in their classes to share with external community members.

Student Leadership

One approach to directing service-learning experiences feasibly in university coursework includes training and using student leaders alongside faculty mentors.

Over the past several decades, campus activities have been transformed into intentional learning opportunities with peer leaders playing a significant role in enhancing the student experience in these settings (Wooten, Hunt, LeDuc, & Poskus, 2012). Historically, student leaders in the university have been involved with orientation and residence life activities (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). In recent years, however, more opportunities have arisen for student leaders to provide services to meet the needs of diverse populations on today’s campuses. Additionally, the roles now extend to academic support. The influence of effective peer leaders has been documented to show significant influence on students’ success as undergraduates (Astin, 1993; Shook & Keup, 2012). Benefits to the institution have been cited to include providing a “cost-effi-
Several student leader models in service learning have been identified in recent literature. For example, at California State University at Monterey Bay (CSUMB), student leaders are prepared in a four-week intense training course and through a summer retreat. This training program for Student Leadership in Service Learning, (sl)2, allows students to focus on self-discovery, social justice, and team building. They form cohorts of fellow leaders who trust and understand each other. These leaders serve as a resource for campus and community. In addition to providing faculty assistance, one of the benefits touted by their student leaders is that “having a student leader in class shows that service learning is not just a bogus requirement” (Mitchell, Edwards, Macias-Diaz, & Weatherbee, 2006, p. 75). Other programs, such as Azusa Pacific (Hutchinson, Gurrola, Fetterly, & Fonts, 2006) and North Carolina State (Clayton & McClure, 2006), also have training for student leaders in service learning. North Carolina State offers a full graded honors course for their leaders in contrast to Azusa Pacific’s three-month time-frame in which rising trainees complete a list of competencies.

Supporting the idea of student leaders in service-learning opportunities, Des Maria, Yang, and Farzanehkia (2000), assert that students who are simply assigned a teacher-designed service-learning project miss an opportunity for decision-making, action planning, and leadership development. Other interrelated themes that have emerged from previous studies with student leaders include positive contributions to academic performance, values, self-efficacy, leadership, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Hecker, 2010).

Students taking a role in guiding the service-learning experiences are able to make decisions and develop leadership skills. The evidence suggests that this leadership is a great contributor to student learning, and their leadership roles serve as key to the successful implementation of large-scale reform (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Finally, Lattanzi et al. (2011) suggest that further research should focus on the peer mentorship experience and its ongoing effects on communication skills, initiative, and cooperation.

Based on the literature supporting the utilization of service-learning experiences in higher education courses, the benefits to the communities and students participating in the projects, and the exhortation of training student leaders, we implemented a program for preparing students as service-learning facilitators to work with faculty in implementation of various service-learning projects. The subsequent study describes the implementation of our Service-Learning Student Facilitators pilot program and the accompanying lessons learned from its successes and challenges.

**Method**

**Participants**

There were two cohorts of students ranging from freshmen to non-traditional undergraduates – four sophomores, five juniors, one senior, two non-traditional undergraduates who were juniors at the time of this program – and one post-baccalaureate student. Six students were in the fall group; seven in spring. Of the 13 students, 11 were female; two were male (one in each cohort).

Faculty members were very instrumental in initiating the program, as they nominated students for the training, or requested trained student facilitators for their projects. Each of the service-learning student facilitators worked closely with a faculty member, who became his/her service-learning faculty mentor.

**Materials and Procedures**

The participants evaluated the training program at three points during the semester—beginning, middle, and end. The first evaluation was given at the end of the initial training, which included two multiple choice questions; two questions, from which participants could circle up to seven statements indicating goals accomplished; six open-ended questions, and one rating scale to assess to what extent the training program had met their needs. (see Appendix A for the questions, statements, and scales used for the initial training program data collection).

At the mid-point, students completed a qualitative survey with eight open-ended questions asking them to reflect on their progress, support system, rewards, challenges, and relationships with faculty mentors. (see Appendix B for the questions used in the midpoint evaluation data collection).

At the end of the semester, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Students responded to a rating scale in which they evaluated four components of the program. They also
responded to ten open-ended questions. An additional question asked students to choose five of ten statements about theoretical knowledge or topics about service learning which they considered most useful for the next cohort. The rating scales included Likert items using ratings of 1-6, strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6) (see Appendix C for the questions, statements, and rating scales used in the final evaluation data collection). All three of these data collections are outlined in Figure 1, Data Analysis Flow Chart. The questions, statements, and scales used for training and evaluation are available from the authors upon request.

**Service-Learning Student Facilitator Training Procedures**

Because the pilot program’s fall cohort training began several weeks into the semester, it was very streamlined. The training program focused on ensuring they had the paperwork completed for their stipend, which was available for this introductory cohort; and making available the resources and the knowledge to successfully manage a semester-long service-learning project. We offered them multiple resources that came from our university’s Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement (OSLCE), along with examples of service-learning programs at other universities. We explained to them how to best work with their faculty mentors, and we also created the Project Binder. Due to the time constraints, we were not able to discuss service learning from a broad theoretical perspective.

The Project Binder was a compendium of everything we had to give the new student facilitators, including multiple forms that they could use in the classroom. The first author and her student facilitator created many forms for their two service-learning classes which we chose to include for everyone to use, if they wished. Forms developed included a service-learning contract, dress code, a student learning measurement which examined learning that occurred both prior to and after the experience, and a student information sheet for community partners (these forms are available from the authors upon request). Many of these things seemed like common sense but were important to address. For instance, students needed to be trained in the proper attire for a community organization which can be different considering the diverse nature of the work for each organization. Also, the information sheet was particularly useful because it gave the community partners a chance to learn about the students who would volunteer with them.

For the pilot program, training was completed in two meetings. The first meeting consisted of introductions, and students received their Project Binder. Students were also introduced to Georgia Southern University’s OSLCE website which contains the service-learning handbook with many ideas for reflection and assessment, as well as links to journals about service learning. Utilizing the feedback from the program, this handbook is continually updated with new information.

We instructed the participants about the stages of service learning. Multiple sources cite this differently, but for the purposes of this program we have created a model we call PERA which includes Preparation, Experience, Reflection and Assessment. Other sources also include celebration and publication as part of service learning. At the end of the first meeting, we gave facilitators a worksheet to complete describing what their project looked like using the PERA model. For the second meeting, they came with these worksheets completed and the time was exclusively used to brainstorm each project with the other facilitators. This interaction provided them greater understanding about service learning; and it allowed them opportunity to troubleshoot problems with any part of their action plan, and to coordinate collaborations with other students and classrooms. After this meeting, we informed them that we were available for support and assistance, but we would not formally meet with them again until the midpoint and final evaluations of their project.

Data from the pilot semester were then used to shape the training program for the spring semester. The training varied in content and what we wished to accomplish with the facilitators. It also varied in the preparation for the facilitators in that, unlike the fall cohort who were awarded a stipend, the spring cohort volunteered to be fully trained and hired in the next semester.
**Student Project Descriptions**

There were a variety of projects that spanned multiple disciplines and departments on campus. Examples of student involvement in class projects included creating children’s books in Spanish for the local Hispanic community; working at the local food bank to understand the effects of unemployment and the recession on homelessness, poverty and hunger; teaching computer skills to older adults at the local library; and improving access to a community garden for improved nutrition. (see Appendix D for a description of all of the projects). A comprehensive list and description of the projects are available from the authors upon request.

**Results**

*Initial Evaluation*

A majority of students thought the appropriate amount of time was spent on training with Student #10 saying that she would have been willing to receive more training. We also asked students about multiple benchmarks that they reached after the first meeting and the second training meeting. The students were given a list of goals after each of the two meetings and were asked to check all of those that applied to them. By the end of the first meeting, student facilitators indicated on their lists that they gained an “awareness of variations between other projects” and “clarified elements of their own project.” This was agreed upon by all of the facilitators. They also agreed with the statement that they “were able to meet other facilitators.” They felt moderately prepared with the elements that allowed them to “develop a timeline of personal due dates, get introduced to resources from the OS-LCE, and leave with an understanding of what to do for the second meeting.” Some students felt that what was missing from the first meeting was a complete understanding of the four elements of service learning as it was taught. However, after the second meeting, a hundred percent of those who answered the post-second meeting analysis agreed that they were able to fully meet and know the other facilitators, they were aware of the challenges of their project, they fully understood the four elements, they clarified their own elements of the project, they developed a timeline, and they became comfortable with all of the resources they had. There was a slight decrease with an understanding of what to do for their next meeting, which would be their midpoint evaluation meeting. Table 1 indicates the number of students who perceived each of the specific goals accomplished. The ratings (1-6) of the training program overall were similar with mean scores of 5.17 and 5.43 for fall and spring cohorts, respectively.

*Midpoint Evaluation*

At the midpoint of the Service-Learning Student Facilitators Program, students in both cohorts were asked eight open-ended questions. For the first question, the students were asked, “Please succinctly define service learning for someone who knows nothing about this topic.” The raters examined all definitions of service learning submitted from both cohorts. Through inter-rater reliability conducted among two service-learning faculty mentors and a service-learning graduate assistant, the definitions were grouped into three categories: good, average, or poor. Each of the three authors independently rated the students’ definitions of service learning. A good definition included the idea that service learning is different from volunteering and is related to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Goals Accomplished</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals Accomplished after First Meeting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met other student facilitators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of variations between other projects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed understanding of four elements of s-l</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarified elements of own project</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed timeline of personal due dates</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduced to resources from office</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left meeting understanding what to do for next meeting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals Accomplished after Second Meeting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained clear understanding of other projects</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of key challenges of s-l projects</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed understanding of four elements of s-l</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarified elements of own project</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed timeline of personal due dates</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became comfortable with the resources from office</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left meeting understanding what to do for next meeting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the course, an average definition of the service included one of these components but not both, and a poor definition did not link the ideas of service, learning, and the relationship to course content. A total of 13 student definitions of service learning were rated at the midpoint of the program. In the fall cohort, one was rated as good, three were average, and two were poor. In the spring cohort, two were good, four were average, and one was poor. Examples of a good definition are, as follows:

Service learning is community service that also includes specific learning objectives that are incorporated into coursework. Unlike volunteering, S-L allows students to connect community service to classroom objectives and critically analyze what was learned (Student #1).

Service learning uses service as an important aspect of the educational experience. It provides an opportunity to link theoretical academic understandings in a practical, real world setting through service. The individual is learning about him/herself and the local community. A good service-learning experience is well integrated into the course rather than seeming disjointed from the rest of the course (Student #2).

Examples of average definitions included:

Service learning is a way to teach students that integrated community service into the curriculum” (Student #3), and “Service learning bridges the gap between the community and the classroom through service opportunities with reflection and assessment” (Student #4).

Definitions ranked as poor were:

Service learning is using your skills in your area of study to serve the community with needs they could not currently meet themselves” (Student #5) and “Volunteering for a cause and learning at the same time (Student #6).

When asked, “At the midpoint, which aspect of your individual service-learning project has taken the most time and attention,” all of the responses mentioned planning or scheduling, including contacting students, creating a calendar and organizing project groups. One student cited researching and learning about the topic as the most time consuming.

The next question asked, “At the midpoint, which aspect of your individual service-learning project has been the most challenging (not necessarily the most time consuming)?” Responses included communication (2), managing/planning/ coordinating (3), legal aspects, and working with multiple community partners or large groups of individuals. Three comments focused on the attitudes of the college students: “negative reaction of students re: SL,” “students do not care and commit,” and “encouraging students to get excited.”

The next question was, “What aspect of the service-learning project has been the most rewarding?” Answers were varied and included making a difference/giving back (4), seeing dedication, enthusiasm, and excitement (4), spreading awareness, and seeing relationships develop (including developing a relationship with a faculty mentor).

The importance of the faculty mentor was evident in answers to the next question: “In what ways has the Faculty Mentor supported you and your ideas?” All 13 respondents voiced positive comments, including: “wonderful” (2), “great” (2), “very supportive” (2), “open and easy to work with,” “guided me but empowered me to do a lot on my own,” “allowed me to take the reins and lead the class,” “showing me different ways to manage my time.” According to one student:

My faculty mentor has supported me by giving myself the leeway to oversee the project in the way that I best see fit. She has afforded me a lot of respect and wiggle room to truly lead this project and that kind of confidence is apparent to the student volunteers. She has also been with me every step of the way in terms of guidance, advice and strategic direction which has been invaluable (Student #7).

Regarding the question, “What information do you feel you lack, or could have used, in getting to this point of your project,” four student facilitators responded, “None.” Two people in the fall cohort said that they suggested starting earlier in the semester. Three respondents named more clarification on what students need to know, knowing more about the project, and that students need to have a clear definition of what service learning is. One person stated that they lacked time management skills, and two people named issues specifically with their project (legal aspects, basic knowledge about gardening).
The last two questions pertained to “advice for future student facilitators, and advice for program administrators to help improve the program for future cohorts.” For future student facilitators, early and constant communication was mentioned three times; one respondent suggested a communication log. Flexibility was suggested twice. One person admonished “to stay on top of things” and another suggested “arranging a time to talk to the class without the professor present so that student concerns could be aired.” Two pieces of advice were to “be dedicated and believe in the course,” and “stay excited about the work you are doing; remember what a great impact it can and will have.”

When asked if they had advice for program administrators, two students stated, “None.” Six people suggested a combination of meetings (less on group meetings, more individual meetings, weekly or bi-weekly meetings), and “have a social or two to improve networking and motivation.” One respondent suggested considering the student’s enthusiasm for the project, and to focus efforts on upper division classes. One person suggested clarification on how involved the student facilitators should be in the actual community service events, or if their role is pre-post planning and evaluation. Two people suggested more information on financial issues (funding for group projects as well as the payroll process).

A final word of encouragement came from Student #7: “Plan, plan, plan. Your plan will fall apart so be flexible and look for opportunities instead of obstacles.”

**Final Evaluations**

The final evaluations submitted by the service learning student facilitators in both spring and fall groups included rating scales and open-ended questions. The rating scales of 1-6, strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6), included questions about their training and binders. In both semesters the students rated their training very highly; no students scored any items about their training below four. Mean scores were derived for each of the ratings.

The fall cohort rated the extent the training “helped me accomplish my goals” slightly lower than the spring cohort (fall M = 5.17; spring M = 5.67). The fall students unanimously assigned a “strongly agree” rating of six for item three (fall M = 6; spring M = 5.5), “The Student Facilitators program coordinators communicated frequently and effectively with me.”

The students consistently rated the third item, “The Student Facilitators program helped me obtain the necessary resources to complete my project,” at a five or six, indicating that they were given the appropriate tools to execute their projects, thus leading to the success of the project (fall M = 5.5; spring M = 5.67).

The item related to their project binder received the most diverse ratings (fall M = 5.33; spring M = 4.75). No students rated this item below a four. The mean ratings are shown in Figure 2.

Although no students rated the item related to their project binder below a four, there were several comments on the open-ended item, which allowed them to express their suggestions for modifications or improvements. Some of the comments included, “(the binder) was not particularly helpful; it was easier to look at everything online/electronically and organize my own system,” “(needs to be) less intimidating,” “larger than necessary and could probably be condensed to five solid tabs,” “physical notebook did not jive with my style.” More positive notes included that most students found forms and materials helpful, and it was suggested to create a guide instead.

When asked about their primary roles working with the community partners, most of the student facilitators saw themselves as liaisons between the university and the community partners. They coordinated the events, scheduled the activities, and helped develop the service opportunities. In one of the projects, the student did not actually work with the community—the professor communicated with the partners. The challenges for working with community partners included scheduling issues and constructing feasible projects given the needs/requests of the community partner. One facilitator had an issue with students photographing sensitive populations, and had to work to correct the problem and regain the trust of the community partners.

The most strengthening aspects of working

![Figure 2. Mean Score of Ratings on Final Evaluations](image-url)
with the faculty mentors, for some of the facilitators, included being part of the class. For others, being able to keep one another accountable and focused on the project was strengthening. One student reported, “We were opposite, so we could work to our own strengths” (Student #8). One student faced a challenge with communicating with the faculty mentor, another student wrote, “When students can see a trusting relations [sic] between professor and facilitator, they lend a great deal of authority” (Student #7). Student facilitators indicated that they received respect from their faculty mentors, who also made sure the students respected them. They also developed a sense of ownership and confidence from the faculty mentor—allowing them “to make executive decisions,” “present to the class without being interrupted,” and “write freely.” Several of the facilitators felt they were treated as equal by their mentors in the project, which boosted their motivation to maximize the experience for the participants. Others were appreciative of the faculty mentors’ guidance, step-by-step through the project.

Working with peers presented both rewards and challenges. The facilitators felt they were liaisons between the faculty mentor and the students participating in the projects, were instrumental in enriching student behaviors, were able to address student questions/concerns, and were the “face of service learning” for the participants. They felt they were bringing structure and organization for the experiences, were creative influences and approachable resources, and aided in focusing the efforts of the students. One student reported, “I was able to get them excited about being engaged” (Student #9).

Another facilitator’s only communication with the students in the project was by phone. The challenges included how to remain professional when working with peers, communicating to the group with so many individualized projects and specific needs, and time management.

When answering, “How did your faculty mentor give you, the student facilitator, validity in the classroom (when leading and/or teaching students),” it was evident from the student facilitator responses that they felt like this experience contributed to a high level of respect and responsibility. One student felt treated as equal in the project, and two other comments included, “(The faculty mentor) gave me leeway to make executive decisions, giving me a sense of ownership and confidence that is evident to the students;” and “(The faculty mentor) allowed me to have the floor, take control, and speak directly to students.” One student was glad that her faculty mentor allowed her to teach, and then just filled in missing pieces rather than interrupt her.

In reflecting on what resources, beyond what was provided, would have aided them during their semester, the students had quite a variety of suggestions. Some of those include: how to apply for grants; training in getting IRB approval; releasing student work/publications; gaining more knowledge about the community partner; legal aspects such as of photographing and releasing personal data; more examples of service-learning; and training on Google docs, calendars, and other scheduling templates/resources.

Some of the other recommendations for improvement included the following: more bonding time with faculty mentor, more focus on real world situations vs. theory, and differentiation between what is or what is not considered a service-learning project.

When asked to select the five most useful topics from 10 suggested, the students chose, What Is Service Learning (definition and the four elements of service learning)? Defining the Roles of the Student Facilitator, the Faculty Mentor, the Community Partner; Communication Expectations and Issues Within Service-Learning Projects; Impact of Service Learning (versus volunteerism or community service); and Problem Resolution and Managing Divergent Goals.

Final remarks from the student facilitators about their experience demonstrated the connection between the service and learning in their own content areas. For example, a marketing research student gained valuable knowledge and application through her project; another student stated, “My experience in the project (writing boilerplates) was beneficial in my class work (developing a sales pitch).”

Discussion
Lessons Learned
As we progressed through the two training sessions, we learned various lessons regarding the process. These lessons are shared below.

Make program decisions based on the data. Students trained in the spring were better prepared to address issues faced by facilitators due to the experiences accumulated from data from the fall cohort. As in all programs, it is beneficial to pay attention to the feedback and data from participants in order to make informed decisions for modifications and improvements.
Immerse the students in the definition of service learning and ensure that they develop understanding. After two semesters of conducting the program where students were trained and certified to be service-learning student facilitators during the same semester, the lessons we learned and the feedback we obtained showed us that facilitators still did not have a comprehensive understanding of the definition of service learning. In order to ensure that our student facilitators were fully equipped to intelligently speak about all that service learning entails, we further developed and clarified the definition of service learning that we wanted students to use during this semester, including the understanding that service learning’s first benefit must be to a non-profit or public agency. To measure how much students learned about the definition of service learning and how they implemented this knowledge through the project, we added a reflection paper relating their understanding, what they learned, and what they thought about the whole process.

Provide for adequate communication on the status of the projects. For the spring cohort, we asked for a chronological timeline of events and notes to demonstrate how facilitators managed and ran the projects. This allowed our students to better manage their time with projects, keep the professors up-to-date on the progress, and allowed the OSLCE to be informed in the event that an intervention was needed.

Provide training in professionalism. We realized that many of our students encountered situations which were new to them as they worked with peers, professors, and community partners. Although dress code expectations were covered, we recognized that the topic of professionalism needed to be more fully developed in subsequent training sessions to better equip our students to deal with the various situations that may arise. For example, one student didn’t understand that permission was needed to share photographs of the project, and another requested mentoring in professionalism in working with peers.

Incorporate “bonding” time. We heard from the facilitators that they needed more social activities and interactions from which they could form friendships and glean from each other’s experiences. Additionally, we discovered that the facilitators and faculty mentors had little time to meet and get to know each other before beginning their work together.

Design/allow user-friendly materials. The actual materials that they used, and the materials from the experience they designed are no longer restricted to the project binder, allowing participants to turn in their materials in various formats. We determined that the students’ various learning styles were not always conducive to a binder, and that it was more ecologically and economically sound to provide resources in a variety of formats, such as electronic versions.

Discourage students from being facilitators in a course in which they are enrolled. In the fall cohort two student facilitators were enrolled in the course which they were facilitating. The perception from other students was that the student facilitator may have had an advantage in the course. As a result, we felt that in future projects the student leaders should not be enrolled in the class while facilitating.

Develop sustainable programs which are not dependent on stipends. We learned that awarding a stipend was not sustainable, and we discovered that students were willing to work in these leadership positions as volunteers. As a result, the student leaders developed a deeper understanding of service as they participated in this capacity, as is evidenced in reflections shared in the results section. Additionally, they were able to apply their skills from this work to their own coursework/career paths.

Embrace the rewards and benefits. An overarching theme that resonated was that the student facilitators’ relationships with the faculty mentors were very rewarding. Beyond their service-learning projects, the research, networking, and employment opportunities for the students were added benefits. In fact, one student was hired by her community partner, and another got a job working with the exact population as her initial project. One of the most striking outcomes of this program, as in other student leadership programs (Mitchell, Edward, Macias-Diz, & Weatherbee, 2006; Clayton & McClure, 2006), was the fact that we were able to create teaching colleagues, and enable student leaders to work in partnership with faculty on campus.

Limitations

One limitation in this study includes the small sample size—faculty from various colleges nominated facilitators to be trained for the service-learning components. This study is unique for our campus; therefore, it is important for future research to consider other programs and contexts at other universities. Despite the limitations of this small study, the attempt to reach the didactic goal in this project helps inform other universities interested in implementing similar programs.
Conclusions and Recommendations

This project resulted in a successful Service-Learning Student Facilitator Program being established at our university, evidenced by the fact that faculty members utilized the student leaders as they successfully implemented service-learning projects in their courses. The lessons learned during this pilot training period are beneficial not only to our program as it continues to operate and expand, but also for other institutions as they explore the idea of training student leaders for service-learning projects.

In addition to the implications from our lessons learned, the recommendations for the Service-Learning Student Facilitators Program include expanding program marketing beyond faculty recommendations to other means of recruiting students, and building the program to a point that faculty from any department who are interested in obtaining a student facilitator can be matched up with a trained student from their department. Additionally, we recommend furthering students’ knowledge and understanding of service learning by expanding the non-credit course piloted in the last semester, Leadership Through Service-Learning, to a two-semester commitment with the first semester including a 12-week course covering multiple topics related to volunteerism and service learning, and the second semester including a certification project.

Many lessons were learned from this pilot project, contributing substantial improvements to the Georgia Southern University Service Learning Student Facilitator training program. It is the hope of the authors that this student leadership program will continue to expand the awareness and understanding of service learning and permeate in courses across all disciplines on our campus. It is also our desire to add to the broader service-learning community by encouraging faculty in other institutions to embrace this model of student leadership as they implement service-learning experiences in their courses.

References


Lattanzi, J.B., Campbell, S.L., Dole, R.L., &


About the Authors
Jerri Kropp is an associate professor in the School of Human Ecology at Georgia Southern University. Nancy McBride Arrington is an assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Georgia Southern University. Veena Shankar served as a graduate assistant in the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement during the development of this manuscript.
Appendix A. Training Program Evaluation Questions

1) The initial training for your pilot cohort was approximately 4 hours long, divided between two meetings. How much time do you think should be spent on training the next cohort of students?
   a. More than 4 hours
   b. The same: 4 hours
   c. Less than 4 hours

2) The first meeting included faculty, and focused on the broad goals and requirements of the program. Please circle items on the list below that you feel the first meeting accomplished. Leave items that were not thoroughly accomplished in the first meeting un-circled.
   a. I got to know the other Student Facilitators in my cohort
   b. I developed my awareness of variations between service-learning projects
   c. I developed my understanding of the four key elements of a service-learning project
   d. I clarified the essential elements of my own service-learning project
   e. I developed a time-line for my Facilitator training, and a sense of what elements are due at what time
   f. I was introduced to the resources I will need from the Service-Learning office
   g. I left the meeting with a clear sense of what to do next, and what to prepare for the second meeting

3) The second meeting had reduced faculty participation, and focused on developing the four key elements of your individual service-learning projects. Please circle items on the list below that you feel we had thoroughly accomplished by the end of the second meeting. Leave items that were not thoroughly accomplished by the second meeting un-circled (in other words, that you feel remain to be fulfilled).
   a. I gained a clear understanding of the other projects being accomplished in my cohort
   b. I developed my awareness of key challenges in service-learning projects
   c. I developed my understanding of the four key elements of a service-learning project
   d. I clarified the essential elements of my own service-learning project
   e. I developed a time-line for my Facilitator training, and a sense of what elements are due at what time
   f. I became comfortable with the resources I will need from the Service-Learning office
   g. I left the meeting with a clear sense of what to do next, and what will be required for the mid-point review.

4) Please recommend improvements we can make in the content and organization of the initial trainings:

5) How much time do you think students should set aside for meeting with their professors during the initial 1-3 meetings at the beginning of the semester?
   a. 2 hours
   b. 3 hours
   c. 4 hours

What items/issues do you think are most important for the faculty mentor and the student facilitator to discuss during this time?

6) What other information did you wish you had known before, during or after the training sessions? (Maybe this was something that you had to search for the answers independently, but might be useful for all students to know during training.)

7) What did you like best or least about the methods of communication between the Student Facilitator program coordinators and yourself (e-mailing, OrgSync, etc.)? Was there anything that could have been improved regarding how you were given information?

8) What did you like about the Project Binder? Was there anything else about the binder that needed to be included, changed or organized differently?

9) Based on the program overall, at this point in time, do you think the Student Facilitators program has met your needs in helping you accomplish your goals for your service-learning projects, and this student leadership position? Choose 1-6 based on the scale below: ________ (your response here)

10) Please provide any other comments or suggestions to help improve this program in the future:

Appendix B. Mid-Point Evaluation Questions

1. Please succinctly define service-learning for someone who knows nothing about this topic.

2. At the mid-point, which aspect of your individual service-learning project has taken the most time and attention?
3. At the mid-point, which aspect of your individual service-learning project has been the most challenging (not necessarily the most time consuming)?

4. At the mid-point, which aspect of your individual service-learning project has been the most rewarding?

5. In what way(s) has your faculty mentor supported you and your efforts?

Appendix C. Final Evaluation Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The Student Facilitators program successfully helped me to accomplish my goals for my service-learning project. _____ (Choose 1-6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. The Student Facilitators program helped me obtain the necessary resources to complete my project. _____ (Choose 1-6)</td>
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<td>c. The Student Facilitators program coordinators communicated frequently and effectively with me. _____ (Choose 1-6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. The Project Binder requirement helped me organize my project and will make the project more easy to reproduce in the future. _____ (Choose 1-6)</td>
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The following questions are free response or choosing from a selection of choices:

e. What was your primary role when working with the community partners? What was the most important or challenging aspect of this relationship?

f. What was your primary role when working with your faculty mentor? What was the most strengthening aspect of this relationship?

g. What was your primary role when working with the students in your classroom? What was the most important or challenging element of this relationship?

h. How did your faculty mentor give you, the student facilitator, validity in the classroom (when leading and/or teaching students)?

i. Can you suggest resources, beyond what you were provided, that would have aided you this semester? This might include a reading on a particular topic, or a form or hand-out you developed during the project. Feel free to make a suggestion without providing specific resources (i.e. “a reading on peer leadership” or “a Google calendar template”).

j. What theoretical knowledge or topics about service learning would be useful to know at the start of the project? (Please choose the five that you think are the most important)

a. What is service-learning? (Definition and the four elements of service-learning)

b. Define the roles of the Student Facilitator, the Faculty mentor, the Community Partner
c. Personal Identity/ the student’s identity as it pertains to doing service-learning work
d. Cultural differences and how differences might impact service-work
e. Communication expectations and issues within service-learning projects

f. Peer Leadership and being a teaching colleague
g. Impact of service-learning (versus volunteerism or community service)
h. Inclusion in service-learning: non-traditional students and students with disabilities
i. Problem resolution and managing divergent goals

j. Power and privilege as it pertains to service-learning

k. Please suggest modifications/improvements to each aspect of the training:

a. The Training Program:

b. The Mid-point evaluation:

c. The Final evaluation:

d. Communication during the Program:

e. The Project Binder:

Appendix D. Description of Service-Learning Projects

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences — Introduction to American Government

The student facilitator assisted the Atlanta Mexican Consulate with their Mobile Documentation Program during the Consulate’s five day visit to Statesboro. Students served approximately 1000 people, assisting with parking and directing people, providing Xeroxing support for the consulate staff, providing childcare to families, assisting with English language interpretation, and cleaning the church at the end of each day. Students in the course first learned reasons for Mexican migration to the United States, the value of immigrant workers to Georgia and about the services foreign consulates provide to their citizens in other countries.

College of Health and Human Sciences — Community Nutrition

The student facilitated a course where students investigated the available food resources provided by the local Farmer’s Market and created recipes and informational flyers as educational materials for the public.
College of Science and Mathematics; Environmental Biology

The student facilitated a varied selection of service learning with two sections of Environmental Biology and hundreds of students. Each student completed at least one three-hour shift at one of the many locations, such as ... ...the students then submitted a comprehensive paper, containing both reflection and assessment, which provided connections to the course material.

College of Education; Methods I Practicum

The student piloted a personal service-learning project in her first grade practicum field placement in order to validate using service-learning in that setting. Her project included mentoring an advanced first-grader with enrichment activities in order to address the needs that accompany the challenge of the young students’ sixth-grade reading level. Based on results from this experience, she helped the COE faculty mentor revise the syllabus of another course with a field placement to include an optional service-learning component. Additionally, she visited the class with the revised syllabus at the beginning of the following semester, presented results and successes of her service-learning experience, facilitated a discussion of possibilities for implementing service-learning in their setting, and encouraged them to select the optional service-learning component.

Provost Office & College of Business Administration — First Year Experience: Global Citizens and Economics in a Global Society

The service-learning student facilitator helped students to understand the effects of unemployment and the recession of the economy on homelessness, poverty and hunger as related to macroeconomics. The facilitator organized students to work at the Food Bank and the Mexican Consulate for at least one three-hour shift.

College of Health and Human Sciences — Children in Hospitals and First Year Experience: Animal Assisted Therapy

The student coordinated students in two classes. In the Animal Assisted Therapy class, students spent ten hours either working with a therapeutic horseback riding program for children with disabilities or with therapy dogs and their handlers. In the Children in Hospitals class, students spent ten hours working with one of four sites devoted to raising awareness and funding for programs such as the Ronald McDonald House or Special Olympics. The student facilitator and the faculty member also developed the forms described earlier that all facilitators in the program now use.

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences — Elementary Spanish I and Spanish Culture

Students in this Spanish course created children’s books in Spanish for the local Hispanic community. The student facilitator prepared students for the project, and facilitated the binding and distribution of the books.

Provost Office — First Year Experience: Global Citizen

This class focused on “how access to education around the world was related to happiness (or life satisfaction)”. The service learning project asked the students to work two hours per week at the local Boys and Girls Club in their afternoon program serving children from disadvantaged homes where educational attainment is not always a priority. Students could choose the activity they liked to supervise, such as helping with homework or leading a play activity. A goal was for college students to realize that there are populations here locally who need help and encouragement in achieving their educational goals. This facilitator also worked with another Global Citizens course with a separate theme. This course involved learning about the cultural differences of minority groups, which is a necessity of learning to adapt in a global environment.

College of Health and Human Sciences, Community Health Nursing

The student facilitated ten groups of students who investigated a spill in the Ogeechee River and the resulting effects on health for different populations living along the river. She served as a point person for communication, mediation and information.

College of Business Administration, Principles of Marketing

The student facilitated a marketing needs assessment project with students who completed multiple hours during the semester working to find data to assist a new community agency non-profit called University Entrepreneurship Zone. They helped house and incubate new entrepreneurs by providing meeting spaces and office equipment at their facility. The students assisted in conducting market research and find potential contacts to expand their outreach.

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences — Aging in America

The student facilitated students who worked one on one to teach computer skills to older adults at the local library. This service learning opportunity allowed students to develop relationships with older adults and see course content come to life in through their interactions, helping to break down unrealistic stereotypes of older adults as frail individuals with limited capacities for learning new skills and allowing them to see that older adults can be active and interested in learning new things.

Provost Office — First Year Experience: Global Citizens

The student facilitated a variety of community events that students could choose from involving awareness and education, as well as some fundraising, for global issues. Events included Heifer International Promotional tables, The Great American Cleanup and a benefit dinner hosted by Barberitos, a local restaurant.

College of Health and Human Sciences — Nutrition & Diet Therapy and Meal Management

The student facilitated two nutrition courses about improving access to locally grown produce through community gardens for improved nutrition.
Moving Toward Reconciliation: Community Engagement in Nursing Education

Majorie A. Schaffer and Carol Hargate

Abstract

The integration of community engagement learning experiences in nursing education promotes a commitment to social responsibility and service. A nursing department implemented learning experiences for undergraduate nursing students across five semesters in churches, schools, and community agencies. Focus group data and selected stories from undergraduate and graduate nursing students, nursing faculty, and community partners provided lessons for establishing effective academic-community partnerships. Lessons learned included: 1) time and academic expectations are constraints, 2) being in the community requires flexibility, 3) working side by side develops relationships, 4) the community teaches faculty and students, and 5) the learning curve needs to be recognized. The lessons learned provide guidelines for nursing faculty and community partners in creating and sustaining partnerships that contribute to educating nurses for practice in a diverse society.

Introduction


Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) promotes the development of partnerships between academic institutions and communities to work toward solving major health, social, and economic challenges (CCPH, 2012). For nursing students, the goal is to facilitate their commitment to social responsibility and service, their desire to improve health care access to those that need it, and their ability to form partnerships with communities to improve the health of populations.

Nursing education integrates classroom learning with clinical experiences in health care settings. In community settings, nursing students have an opportunity to hear the stories about the life experiences of individuals and families and how these life experiences are connected with health and access to health care. There may be differences in values and lifestyle approaches between community members, community organizations, nursing students, and nursing faculty that lead to discomfort, tension, or frustration. Learning experiences in community settings provide nursing students opportunities to adapt to and reconcile differences and live with ambiguity while working toward common goals. Experiential learning increases capacity to become more effective in providing nursing care to diverse populations and communities, ultimately contributing to reduced health disparities and improved population health.

Purpose

This paper presents the stories of students, community partners, and faculty about the benefits and challenges encountered through community engagement learning. In addition, the lessons learned for forming effective academic-community partnerships are examined through the stories of partnership participants.

Context

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a central aspect of nursing education, particularly related to preparing nurses to address health inequities and engage diverse communities in dialogue about potential solutions. Reconciliation with individuals, groups, or communities involves setting aside an attitude or action in order to bring about positive change and restore relationships (Boesack & DeYoung, 2012). Curricular strategies that promote relationship building between students and community members foster both knowledge and skill building.
to work in partnership with diverse populations in an ethical and sensitive manner. In nursing, a focus on reconciliation is also consistent with the central nursing concept of caring. DeYoung (2007) stated relationship building is the hard work of reconciliation that offers something that cannot be found in social or economic justice alone. Implementing community engagement into the nursing curriculum serves to unite nursing educators, students, and community members in moving toward reconciliation and improved health outcomes.

Social Justice
Social justice focuses on the balance of societal burdens and benefits and holds that members of society have rights and responsibilities to promote equity in the distribution of burdens and benefits (Boutain, 2008). A focus on social justice will prepare students to be social change agents and develop the skills for implementing actions that improve the health of vulnerable populations (Boutain, 2005; Fahrenwald, 2003). One strategy for creating learning opportunities in social justice is the use of innovative community settings where students encounter social injustices. Kirkham, Hofwegen, and Harwood (2005) analyzed nursing students’ responses to encounters with poverty and inequities in clinical experiences in innovative community settings, including corrections, international, parish, rural, and aboriginal settings in Canada. Focus groups with 65 undergraduate students, clinical instructors, and nurse mentors yielded narratives of social justice. Through development of a greater awareness of poverty, inequities, and marginalization, students developed a commitment to social change.

Community Engagement
Community engagement is the “application of institutional resources to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities” (CCPH, 2012). The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2012) identified community engagement as one of the multifaceted and targeted solutions featured in disparities projects. Community engagement provides “the seeds we need to plant for change.” The Carnegie Foundation (2012) developed a community engagement elective classification system to recognize the community engagement initiatives of institutions of higher learning. The Foundation identified reciprocal partnerships as a key criterion for the community engagement classification. CCPH promotes the development of authentic partnerships. Three essential components for an authentic community partnership include: 1) the partnership must be relationship-focused, open, honest, respectful, and committed to mutual learning and sharing the credit for accomplishments; 2) outcomes must be meaningful to the community; and 3) transformation should occur at multiple levels, including personal (through self-reflection) and institutional levels, community capacity building, generation of new knowledge, and social justice (CCPH, 2012).

Research on community engagement reveals that students with positive community engagement experiences have a heightened sense of civic responsibility, challenge stereotypes, become more culturally aware, and appreciate similarities and differences across cultures (Hunt & Swiggum, 2007; Mueller & Norton, 2005). Community engagement experiences also develop students’ leadership, critical thinking, professional decision making, social skills, and social awareness. For students, learning outcomes are enhanced through a pedagogy that includes: 1) active learning, 2) frequent non-threatening feedback from all collaborators, c) collaboration, d) a mentor to facilitate transfer of theory to practice and navigate complex situations that may develop, and 5) practical applications that are in the real world but have a safety net for mistakes (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Schussler, Wilder, and Byrd (2012) explored nursing student development of cultural humility in student reflective journaling through four semesters in a community clinical experience. The researchers identified two concepts in the reflective journals that contributed to development of cultural humility. Students linked poverty to health disparities when they discovered how a lack of resources contributes to power imbalances. In addition, students learned they needed to integrate cultural factors when planning health promotion teaching.

Development of the Community Engagement Curriculum
Bethel University is a small private liberal arts college in a suburban location with proximity to a major metropolitan area. The nursing program implemented a revised nursing curriculum in 2010 that featured community engagement curricular activities. Faculty aimed to prepare nurses who will: 1) contribute to reducing health disparities, 2) develop cultural sensitivity and competence, and 3) develop commitment to serving diverse and vulnerable populations. These goals are consistent with
the Bethel University values of reconciliation and peacemaking.

To prepare for the community engagement learning experiences, nursing faculty and graduate students conducted focus groups with potential community partners to explore community views on how nursing students could be involved in their organizations. Analysis of data from 11 focus groups with churches, schools, non-profit agencies, and a long-term care facility revealed relevant curricular themes of what was needed to support the community engagement curriculum.

The resulting themes included adequate orientation for students, clear expectations, working out scheduling and logistics, matching student interest with the organization, addressing the challenges of interaction with populations in the community, and brainstorming about project ideas (Wattman, Schaffer, Juarez, Rogstad, Bredow, & Traylor, 2009). The nursing department sponsored a series of reconciliation lunches during one semester that were led by a trained facilitator for all nursing faculty. The following semester, faculty and community partners participated in “Lunch and Learn Sessions” that featured discussion about selections from the Unnatural Causes DVD series on health disparities (http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/). A quasi-intergroup dialogue format was used to elicit community participants’ reflections on community health concerns and challenges and potential solutions. Democratic intergroup dialogue is one strategy that can help groups move toward reconciliation; this approach recognizes and respects all parties, creates a setting that reinforces the notion that change is possible, and transforms relationships toward positive social change. From such changes, public decision making is influenced, and new, previously unknown results can be produced (Schoem, 2003; Zubizaretta, 2002). Characteristics of intergroup dialogue include fostering an environment that enables participants to speak and listen in the present while understanding the contributions of the past and the unfolding of the future (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006).

Through intergroup dialogue, the community participants identified “walls” (barriers) and “doors” (solutions) associated with the community’s self-identified health inequities. The identified barriers and solutions for challenges encountered were then categorized as health and behavior, social and economic, and physical factors in their environment (see Figure 1).

Community engagement learning experiences were implemented in the Spring Semester of 2011 in 21 community engagement sites, with a faculty liaison assigned to each site and the appointment of a community engagement coordinator in the Nursing Department. Initially 2–5 sophomore students were assigned to each site. With full implementation of the curriculum, students at each site range from 6–15. (See Table 1 for a more complete description of the community engagement curriculum.) Additional features of the community engagement program include Student Community Engagement Council meetings (twice a semester) and Community Partner meetings (once a semester). Student Community Engagement Council members represent all students and contribute to the planning process for community engagement curricular implementation.

**Method**

Methods included focus groups with sophomore nursing students (a program evaluation component), and recorded or written stories from Student Community Engagement Council members, graduate students, nursing faculty, and

![Figure 1. Barriers and Solutions and Response to Health Disparities](image_url)
community partners. A graduate nursing student conducted two focus groups with sophomore nursing students in a University classroom following their first semester in their community engagement setting to evaluate student learning experiences in the sophomore year. No faculty members were present during the focus groups. Faculty instrumental in initiating community engagement experiences generated the focus group questions based on suggestions from the Community Engagement Through Service Learning Manual (Case Western Reserve University, 2001) and goals for student learning experiences. Focus group questions addressed positive and frustrating experiences; learning about self, nursing, community agency, and community; needs of the community; and contributions made to the community. One student was randomly selected from each community engagement site from a total of 90 students assigned across 21 community engagement sites. The study was approved by the Bethel University Institutional Review Board and all participants signed a consent form. Two focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed. A content analysis strategy was used to identify focus group themes. The graduate student who conducted the focus groups organized content themes, which were reviewed, revised, and validated by the first author. Additionally, others involved in community engagement (a convenience sample) were asked to provide stories about their experiences. They were contacted by phone, in-person, or email and invited to participate in sharing their experiences with community engagement. Written consent was obtained for using their stories. Student Community Engagement Council members, graduate students who had an internship experience with the community engagement undergraduate program, nursing faculty who were liaisons to community engagement sites, and community partners provided stories in a written or oral format (audio taped). The stories represent the experiences of nursing students, nursing faculty, and community partners following one to two semesters of community engagement experiences.

Results
Two focus groups were conducted; one group had eight students and the second included nine students. A content analysis of student comments revealed six themes: 1) experiencing difference, 2) framing learning experiences, 3) learning from the community, 4) acquiring professional skills, 5) experiencing ambiguity, and 6) creating effective community engagement partnerships.

Experiencing difference. Students noted there were differences in the communities, environment, and life experiences in comparison to their own life experiences. A student reflected on wondering how youth in an African American church viewed white students:

I was a little nervous going into my site actually because it’s an all-African-American church and I could just tell people were looking at me like what are you doing here so I can be a little negative and say that but I was just a little nervous at first because what do they think of us coming to their youth group, us four white students coming from [the University]. They probably have a lot of assumptions in their head going on just like we do--its natural for people when they first come into an environment. It’s been good to just be able to throw those stereotypes aside and just realize we all serve the same God and he loves us all equally.

Framing learning experiences. Students reflected on how they understood the purpose and outcomes of CE, including learning public health approaches, learning to love people in the community, and being able to integrate their faith. One student specifically discussed reconciliation:

I think a big focus of [the University] is reconciliation and I feel like community engagement helps us to reconcile ourselves with the community and find ways of dealing with different social disparities but to also learn from them and become better people ourselves from the experience and also to help the community as well.

Learning from the community. As students spent time in their community settings, they began to realize the potential of their learning from the people they were serving. A student reflected on the first realization of the purpose of the experience:

… it’s like this is a group of people, it is like a family or church buddy, it is like just knowing them, there is so much for me to learn, and I don’t know how much we are there to help them as much as just to know them. Right now we did a blood pressure
screening but it’s not like they needed us to do that. It’s like learning from them—being who they are is a lot to offer us. So I think right now it’s just for me to know them, their lives, their communities, and their families.

**Acquiring professional skills.** A number of student comments addressed how skills practiced in community engagement would contribute to their competence in nursing, specifically focusing on communication, teamwork, and problem solving. A student reflected about the skill of problem solving:

I think another really vital one [skill] that we learned is problem solving. …. You just have to learn how to improvise and go with it and figure out what you are doing, different situations that you may come across at the sites you may have to problem solve. It’s really critical as a nurse to be able to have that skill.

Several students commented about the teamwork experience in their community engagement setting and the realization that different viewpoints exist within the nursing profession. For example: “I think it’s like a lesson that we would learn for the rest of our lives…” “We need to get outside of our little bubble and realize that there are going be a lot of nurses that don’t have the same vision of nursing.” …. “I need to realize that maybe not everyone thinks like me or wants to become a nurse for the same reason as me but ultimately we are all on the same team of providing the best care we can for the patient.”

**Experiencing ambiguity.** Many students commented about the challenges of working in a community setting in which the roles and tasks of nursing students are less clearly defined. They reported experiencing ambiguity in role expectations, the community partner’s lack of knowledge about community engagement, unclear communication channels, and difficulty scheduling their community engagement experience. Students discussed the ambiguity of working with the faculty liaison and community partner to determine their purpose and activities in the community setting. They expressed that expectations were not clear and in some cases neither the faculty liaison nor community partner was able to provide them with clear guidance.

Creating effective community engagement partnerships. In focus groups, students contributed suggestions about the faculty liaison role, orientation format, and matching the community engagement sites to coordinate with student schedules. They discussed the variability in interactions with the faculty liaison. A student expressed appreciation for the faculty liaison:

My faculty member in charge of our site really took an extra step to get to know our group members because after the first time we went to the site, she took us out to lunch; we just sat down and got to know her a little better. It was really awesome because it wasn’t like an initiative to do better but really made me see her goals for us and even as a person getting to know her better makes me want to help out more because I feel like she will back us up.

In contrast, another student expressed that students should have greater responsibility:

We don’t even have a liaison and its better because there is no one to communicate through and it’s gone really smoothly. I feel like it’s been really helpful to have it that way, more responsibility on the students rather than faculty.

Other students commented about wanting more consistency between the faculty liaisons. A student expressed that many of their questions were left unanswered (ambiguity). What they wanted from the faculty liaison was to “get the ball rolling right away” and help them to feel more comfortable by making the initial contact with the community partner.

**Stories from Students on the Community Engagement Council**

A student shared an experience in learning about a residence that served women recovering from addiction and abuse:

Another neat aspect that we saw was a huge kitchen where women can learn to cook healthy meals for themselves and their families. Most of the women grew up in homes where abuse was so prevalent there was no teaching, so for them to learn these skills is crucial to their success. The thing I loved most is that they don’t
just teach people how to simply get over their addiction; they teach them how to heal from the inside out, which is what ultimately brings healing. I look forward to another three semesters there and can’t wait to go visit again!

Another student talked about the difficulty of meeting with the faculty liaison, encountering uncertainty about how students should interact with the organization, the challenge of finding time with the academic schedule, and the hope for continued opportunity for involvement in the organization.

Student Community Engagement Council members also shared reflections of a lunch with health coordinators and staff from an organization, which is a collaboration of African American churches to build community and promote healthy living and values. Masters and undergraduate nursing students developed resource notebooks in response to a request from the health coordinators for a health education tool. An undergraduate student noted the challenge of integrating different groups at a partnership luncheon:

It was cool to see the people who were there…. We were talking afterward how it was very segregated. [The University] was all in one area and everyone else from the community was in their own …it was just the nature of the thing, but it was kind of sad because we’re doing this to get more cultured and we all just kind of segregated together.

The same student also reflected about community strengths. She commented, “for me personally, I learned how there are a lot of people who really do care about the community.”

Another student reflected on the meaning of hope for communities that experienced health disparities:

It was the pastor I believe really put a sense of hope back in me. Because unfortunately we’re talking about health disparities and we are seeing the economy and we’re seeing firsthand what’s happening so those who are even less fortunate are even becoming more, less fortunate. He just talked about hope. We are doing something and even though it’s something small, hopefully that trickle effect will be larger and we are stronger together than we are apart. I walked away feeling really hopeful where I had been feeling not so hopeful and a little desperate in that situation.

A student whose group had been unable to establish a connection with their assigned church expressed feeling encouraged by hearing about activities and interactions at the lunch. The student commented,

Seeing people at the luncheon and that they are so excited to have people come into their church was really hopeful and we were able to see by all the students coming into the community, the big effect it has on the community, and what we can learn from the community as well.

The lunch event served a similar purpose for another student whose group who had not been able to connect with the church health coordinator. The student reflected,

It was nice to hear all the other coordinators and hear them say “We’re so excited to have students working with us.” … All of them seem really passionate about what they were doing. They were very concerned about their communities. That was refreshing…. Going to that luncheon was really cool. Even though we are not at that site anymore I have a good idea of what the other groups are experiencing.

Stories from Graduate Students

Graduate students assisted with community engagement activities in a variety of ways. They provided classroom content, assisted with coordination of activities, and contributed to evaluation of the community engagement curriculum. Graduate students reflected on connecting with the community and the benefits of working in partnerships. A graduate student wrote,

Our teaching opportunity for the students came with having them present and explain the resource binder [Reaching for Healthier Tomorrow] and its uses to their individual community site leader. For me and my [teaching] partner, it was breaking the ice by engaging the leaders in a health quiz and giving a live cooking demonstration using one of the healthy recipes from the created
resource binder. For the leaders, it was having the opportunity to get to know us and have materials that they could use for their community. This learning experience reinforced, to me, that opportunities for learning, growth, and partnership can take many forms.

Another graduate student reflected on opportunities for “exponential growth and opportunity for strengthening interpersonal and leadership skills during times of project success and failure.” Graduate students balanced the uncertainty of the community settings, coached undergraduate students to gain learning from both successes and challenges, and focused on their own leadership growth.

The graduate student who conducted focus groups with sophomore students following their first semester, made the following observations:

Many students went into this course with the assumption that they will be teaching the community and making an impact on the lives of community members. At the end of the first semester since the implementation of (community engagement), it was quite astonishing to most students the amount of learning and growth that has taken place regarding various cultural values and beliefs... . Community engagement also allows nursing students the majority of whom are white to come in contact with people that they have little or no interaction with in the past. Through meaningful partnerships, nursing students are able to throw stereotypes aside and treat community members with as much respect as they deserve.

Stories from Faculty Members

Faculty members also experienced challenges with scheduling community engagement experiences. One of the faculty liaisons adapted to this challenge by finding an alternative community engagement site that was familiar to them. Another faculty member discussed the learning that results from uncertainty:

Learning to be flexible and willing to feel “uncertain of what to do” or “out of their element” are the peripheral, yet equally important learning aspects of this experience. It takes courage to go into another culture and introduce oneself, offering involvement with health initiatives already started, and a willingness to do whatever one can yet feeling inadequate for the task at hand.

The faculty member noted that leadership learning experiences were “rocky” because of busy schedules that became a barrier to following through on communication. However, there were also opportunities for growth in leadership, indicated in the following comment:

The student leadership that emerged through the experience has been quite remarkable and also a learning experience. One young man displayed a passion for this experience and by default took over leadership of the group. He emailed meeting times and topics and led the “in-person” meeting of the group, with a written agenda. He also connected with the site on several occasions, connecting emotionally as well, emailing over the summer to ask if they were okay after tornadoes [hit the area].

Another faculty member described a learning experience in the community engagement setting that promoted student learning about the diversity of the facility. Nursing students tabulated all the different languages spoken in a long-term care facility. The faculty member worked with students to create a “wordle” (www.wordle.net/) document of languages, which resulted in a colored illustration of “word clouds from text.” The faculty member explained that the resulting illustration “emphasized the diversity of the facility. The administrators at the facility were happy to have some meaningful art to hang in the halls of the facility. The students became acquainted with the facility and the facility benefited from the product of the class exercise.”

Stories from Community Partners

A health coordinator from one of the churches expressed satisfaction with student participation in a church flu shot clinic. She said, “The three nursing students volunteered to take blood pressures. More people, young and old, came down to get their blood pressure checked and also got a flu shot.”

The community partner that worked directly with all health coordinators at the churches spoke about both student involvement and satisfaction.
with the resource notebook that focused on healthy living:

Some of the successes are the great preparation and community interaction prior to the students actually entering the community of faith. The coordinators, pastor, and congregation at the churches were welcoming and made the students feel a part of the church congregation although they may have been somewhat apprehensive at first especially if, for the first time they were the minority. The students have attended the worship services and stayed for the entire service (more than an hour) and have connected to the other young adults in the congregation and the younger children admire them. They continue to communicate with the coordinator after the semester ends in preparation for the next semester. The resource book that was created and provided for the churches is brilliant and a priceless tool in the hands of those overseeing the health ministry in their churches. I personally found the Low-Calorie Meals gift book for participating in the health quiz a must in my kitchen and can use it as a teaching tool for nutrition classes.

The director of the program also spoke about the challenges encountered in working with different calendars and volunteers as well as managing changes that occur in funding and resources:

One of the challenges with the churches is fitting the health ministry into the church calendar. The churches with an established and strong health ministry can quickly integrate nursing students into health ministry while in the other churches it is a greater challenge and may leave the students a little frustrated. However, we are expecting some changes especially since the positive reports have promoted others to request nursing students for their church. In many churches those working in the health ministry are volunteers making it extremely difficult for consistent follow through…I believe this is an exceptional concept to incorporate/integrate community engagement in underserved communities for the nursing students’ education and commend you for the commitment to see it through.

**Discussion**

**Strengths and Limitations**

The strength of this project is the inclusion of stories from all partnership participant categories, which gives a more complete picture of community engagement learning experiences. Since sophomore students were randomized into focus groups, their stories are likely to be more representative of student views. However, Student Community Engagement Council members, nursing faculty, and community partner participants were recruited based on their availability, which means the stories likely do not capture the full range of views about community engagement experiences.

**Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned stem from the voices of students, community partners, and faculty about their community engagement experience and the authors’ experiences with overseeing the implementation of the community engagement curriculum.

**Time and academic expectations are constraints.** All stakeholders seem to value the goals of community engagement—reducing health disparities, developing cultural sensitivity and competence, and developing a commitment to vulnerable populations. However, the reality of finding time to devote to these goals in the midst of a content-driven curriculum and the busy schedules of students, community partners, and faculty is a major challenge. “All the academic stuff,” as one student said, eclipses the time needed to invest in community engagement. It is important for all stakeholders to keep the goals of community engagement in the forefront. Faculty and students are learning to “let go” or adapt expected assignments and tasks, given the uncertainty and changing community environment. The key lesson learned is that change is a process and a good portion of the learning happens during the process, sometimes more than the learning that results from the end product or outcome.

**Being in the community requires flexibility.** Although nursing faculty endorse and even embrace the idea of reconciliation, the hard long-term community relationship building that is foundational to reconciliation (DeYoung, 2007) is a major challenge in several ways to nursing faculty. Barriers to the development of long-term relationships between nursing faculty and the community include: changes in faculty course assignments, changes in community agency staff, and time constraints faculty experience in juggling multiple roles. Time
management and complex schedule challenges in community engagement are consistent with barriers to effective academic-community partnerships identified in the literature (Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, & Bothne, 2010; Simpson 2012). In addition, the norm for nursing faculty is to develop the course plan prior to each semester, and then follow the syllabus until the course is finished. From an academic perspective, nursing faculty and nursing students have learned to cope and “survive” by living by their “to do lists.” This organized approach is consistent with an academic and hospital environments, but can create tension in collaboration in community settings. In community settings, the “to do list” may change several times within a semester timeframe.

Working side by side develops relationships. If community partners, nursing students, and nursing faculty can move beyond the constraints of time and the norms of their different settings, they have the opportunity to experience joy and satisfaction as they work together. The work of reconciliation means the authentic or “real” person shows up and shares knowledge, skills, and ideas to work toward a common goal. Creating time to share food and open conversation is crucial to relationship building—working side by side as CE experiences are implemented. In a qualitative study about cultural safety in nursing and nursing education (Doutrich, Arcus, Dekker, Spark, & Pollock-Robinson, 2012), the researchers identified one of the major themes as “learning to walk alongside.” This involves a partnership model in which all voices are important and included in decision-making.

The community teaches students and faculty. Although both students and faculty expressed frustration with the uncertainty of their community connections and for some the connections did not happen, the uncertainty also can lead to increased problem solving by students. Nursing faculty members that take on the role of a “coach” (in contrast to the traditional faculty role of “director”) are more likely to emphasize the learning that comes from being in the community. Both students and faculty may need to continue moving out of their “comfort zone” in wanting detailed plans for completing specific activities and tasks.

One example showcased in the student stories illustrated the phenomenon of segregation. In this situation, the student learned about the meaning of segregation through sitting in different groups at an event in the community. The same learning would be much less likely to occur in the classroom setting. From this learning experience, the student developed the motivation to do things differently in future experiences in the community.

The learning curve needs to be recognized. The stories represent community engagement experiences midstream in curricular implementation. Since change is a constant given the differences in roles and settings, community engagement partnerships and learning strategies are dynamic and will change through the implementation process. This experience is consistent with how our real world works. Thus we need to recognize that we will learn also from times when the experience does not go as expected. As we work to develop meaningful relationships, we need to recognize that it takes time, we all bring different skills and expertise that are important to the collaboration process, and we need to forgive one another when our understanding or capacity is limited. We have hope in the capacity to learn ways of moving toward reconciliation.

Conclusion: Moving Toward Reconciliation
Reconciliation is an ongoing and continuing process and is certainly characterized by “bumps in the road,” collisions of tensions, and stops and starts. Community partners welcomed nursing faculty and students into their organizations, creating strong partnerships and the development of a broad array of strategies and resources that contribute to healthier communities. Nursing faculty and students along with the community partners joined together, were courageous in starting the journey, and desired to contribute to the development of future nurses.

References


About the Authors

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Learning to Vote: Informing Political Participation Among College Students

Suzanne Pritzker, Melanie Springer, and Amanda Moore McBride

Abstract

To inform universities’ capacity to encourage student political participation, we examine associations between four civic influences — civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning — and youth participation during the 2008 presidential election. These four influences were selected because they are commonly integrated into higher education environments. Using an original survey we employ a broad definition of political behavior to explore ways college students express themselves politically and to examine potential influences on their participation. We hypothesize that students exposed to civic influences are more likely to vote and engage in other participatory activities than those who lack such exposure. Findings reveal that educationally-based civic influences that specifically address political content are more strongly associated with political behavior than is service-based activity. This supports an on-going reform discourse that targets civic education as a promising avenue for increasing youth participation in American elections and suggests a key role that universities can play during election years.

Decades of research have shown that young people are consistently less likely to vote — or to engage in any of the other civic or political behaviors that often precede voting — than are other age cohorts in American politics (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Wattenberg, 2008). While this remains true, youth participation in presidential elections in the last three elections has exceeded participation in 1996 and 2000 (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE, 2008; CIRCLE, 2013]). Higher education institutions can implement strategies to continue to advance growth in youth political participation.

In fact, higher education institutions play a critical role. College-educated youth participate more actively than counterparts who lack a college education. For example, 55–62% of college-educated youth voted in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, while only 28–36% of non-college-educated youth did so (CIRCLE, 2013). Yet, there is still substantial room to increase engagement even among youth attending college. To expand participation, reform efforts should influence youth political knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Berinsky, 2005; Hanmer, 2009). Higher education institutions have not always prioritized undergraduate political learning (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007); however, educationally based civic influences that are rooted in civic education and volunteer service may, in fact, further increase political engagement among college students (Flanagan, 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Wattenberg, 2008; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006).

To inform future efforts to increase youth participation in politics, we systematically examine the extent to which exposure to a variety of civic influences in a higher education setting is associated with an increased likelihood of engagement in political activity among college students. Using an original survey, we examine multiple forms of election year political participation among undergraduate students at a private, mid-western research university. Civic education in higher education settings can take a variety of forms, including classroom-based civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussions about politics and current events, participation in community service, and academic-based service learning in which coursework is paired with community service. We investigate the extent to which these four forms of civic education are associated with undergraduate student political participation. Prior research has not examined the relationships of each form of civic education with distinct avenues for political behavior.

Higher Education-Based Civic Influences

Research consistently finds that education is directly associated with youth political participation (CIRCLE, 2010; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). As young people advance in education beyond
high school, they increase political interest and community engagement through volunteer activity (Finlay & Flanagan, 2009). Policy makers, educators, and researchers have highlighted the important role that higher education institutions can play in encouraging civic engagement (e.g., Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Callan, 2004; Colby et al., 2007; Galston, 2001; McBride, 2008). Educationally-based civic influences, including civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning, are key ways that youth in a higher education setting may learn to become more active and politically engaged citizens (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Finlay & Flanagan, 2009; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Specifically, courses and co-curricular activities that seek to promote “responsible political engagement” have been linked with increases in political participation among students with no prior political interest (Colby et al., 2007, p. 8).

Civic instruction refers to courses through which students gain knowledge about government and processes of influencing government. There is, however, substantial disagreement about the extent to which classroom-based civic instruction affects political interest and the likelihood of political activity (e.g., Galston, 2007; Niemi & Junn, 1998). Deliberative course-based discussion refers to direct student engagement in thoughtful discussions around political and current events. Such discussions involve “citizens voicing rational reasons for their preferences, listening to one another, exchanging information and thereby moving towards decision making on the contentious issues facing society” takes place (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002, p. 23). Courses across disciplines can enable political deliberation if instructors foster open inquiry into a wide array of issues (McMillan & Harriger, 2002). Through deliberative discussion, students learn to understand and tolerate diverse opinions, ultimately reexamining their notions of citizenship and engaging in their communities (Callan, 2004; McMillan & Harriger, 2002). Compared with counterparts who lack such an experience, students who experience classroom-based deliberative discussion are more likely to exhibit political interest, whether through attention to the news or sharing political opinions in conversation, and to report intent to engage in civic activity (Campbell, 2005; McDevitt & Kioussis, 2006; Niemi & Junn, 1998).

In terms of service-oriented civic influences, community service typically is offered outside of the classroom and is not directly linked to classroom content. In this way, it differs from the three other civic influences discussed above. Volunteer opportunities may be arranged formally by university staff or student organizations, but also may occur informally with other students. For example, students can participate in an alternative spring break experience or regular sorority-sponsored visits to the local Ronald McDonald House. Community service is central to the construction of youth’s civic and moral identity. It increases students’ ties to their communities and is expected to have long-term impacts on their political behavior (Yates & Youniss, 1998). However, students are most likely to gain civic benefit from service projects that they find to be meaningful (Galston, 2001; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003).

Service learning tends to be based in the classroom. It features structured volunteer service that is linked to educational objectives and systematic reflection on the service experience. Service learning can enable students to transfer knowledge and experiences between the classroom and a real-world setting. Through it, students can develop habits of participating in community life. Compared to their non-involved counterparts, college students involved in long-term service learning exhibit greater participation in such civic activities as raising awareness about social and political issues via the Internet, solving community problems, and engaging in consumer political activity (Keen & Hall, 2008, 2009). A longitudinal collegiate service learning study indicates that continued community engagement is a key outcome; rates of post-college volunteering are more than twice the national average (Tomkovich, Lester, Flunker, & Wells, 2008). It should be noted that youth volunteerism has been linked to a “substitution effect,” whereby students opt for future volunteer service in lieu of political engagement (Walker, 2000). The concern that service activities might replace political activity is illustrated by research findings that 94% of 15–24 year-olds identify helping others as the most important civic responsibility (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999).

Defining Political Behavior

Our definition of political behavior captures a variety of ways in which young adults engage politically (Beaumont et al., 2006; Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006). Existing research is limited because it neglects the diverse forms of active political participation that American youth engage in beyond voting. A generational shift in political...
involving political behaviors. In accordance with service learning — are linked with a broad set of course-based discussion, community service, and civic influences — civic instruction, deliberative political behaviors, such as voting. However, typically measure effects on traditional on civic instruction and deliberative discussion, participating in consumer politics (p. 106). Studies working with others to help one’s community, and termed as “self-actualizing”; namely, volunteering, the forms of engagement that Bennett et al. (2009) learning and community service research prioritizes to vary based on the influence under study. Service youth participation, measures of participation tend between civic influences in higher education and years ahead.

For example, students may challenge economic decisions made by their administration that run counter to either the students’ values or the values that they believe the college or university purports to reflect. Students concerned about climate change at Washington University in St. Louis, Stanford, Harvard and at least 300 other colleges and universities in the U.S. have engaged in petitions, student body referenda, marches, and protests to try to persuade their schools to divest from coal mining and/or oil companies (Chappell, 2014; Shogren, 2013). Encouraging expressive forms of engagement can present an opportunity for increasing youth political participation in the years ahead.

In the literature that examines relationships between civic influences in higher education and youth participation, measures of participation tend to vary based on the influence under study. Service learning and community service research prioritizes the forms of engagement that Bennett et al. (2009) termed as “self-actualizing”; namely, volunteering, working with others to help one’s community, and participating in consumer politics (p. 106). Studies on civic instruction and deliberative discussion, however, typically measure effects on traditional political behaviors, such as voting.

We examine how each of these four structured civic influences – civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning – are linked with a broad set of student political behaviors. In accordance with prior research that establishes a “substitution effect” (e.g., Walker, 2000), we expect influences that specifically address political content – civic instruction and deliberative discussion – to be strongly associated with traditional behaviors (e.g., voting and participation in campaign activities) and service-based civic influences to be strongly associated with less-traditional behaviors (e.g., social activism and political consumerism). Furthermore, we seek to confirm a meaningful distinction between traditional electoral behaviors and expressive behaviors in this college student sample (Bennett et al., 2009; Zukin et al., 2006).

Research Design and Methods

The authors conducted a two-part panel survey of students at a private, mid-western research university. The survey, an online instrument created specifically for this study, asked about students’ political participation and exposure to four education-based civic influences during the 2008 presidential election. The survey was implemented through StudentVoice, an online survey tool regularly used by student organizations and the administration at the university. At two time points (Time 1, Time 2), an invitation to participate in the study and a link to the survey were sent to the students’ university email accounts. The Time 1 survey was administered in mid-September 2008, prior to the first presidential debate, and the Time 2 survey was administered just after Election Day in 2008.

Sample Selection and Characteristics

An online survey link was sent at Time 1 to 1,991 18–25 year old undergraduate students who are U.S. citizens, with African-American and Asian-American students oversampled (approximately 35% of the student body). At Time 1, 767 students completed the survey (39% response rate). The shorter Time 2 survey included questions focusing specifically on candidate preferences and political behavior between the first presidential debate and Election Day. Only students who completed the Time 1 survey received invitations to participate in the Time 2 follow-up, which was completed by 460 students (61% response rate). Retaining only students registered to vote yielded a final sample of N = 764 at Time 1 and N = 456 at Time 2. The voter registration requirement excluded a minimal number of respondents, as almost all respondents (95.5%) reported being registered to vote at Time 1, nearly two months prior to the general election.

The Time 1 and Time 2 samples share similar
demographics and political affiliation with the student body. At Time 1, more female students were in the sample (60%) than in the university’s student body (approximately 50%), while the percentages were similar for white students (61% of Time 1 participants, 59% of the university’s student body). Due to oversampling, the African-American (17%) and Asian-American (16%) percentages exceed their representation at the university (6% and 14%, respectively). Just 3.1% of the sample was Hispanic. As shown in Table 1, respondents were predominantly from suburban areas (76%), and the mean age was 19.56 (SD=1.23). Compared to young voters and four-year college students across the U.S. (CIRCLE, 2008; Harvard Institute of Politics [IOP], 2008), substantially more students self-identified as Democrats (63%) and liberal (56% liberal or very liberal); fewer identified as Republicans (11%), Independents (27%), or conservative (7% conservative or very conservative).

At Time 2, almost all respondents reported voting in the 2008 general election (97%). In contrast, 90% of all registered voters in the U.S. voted in that election (File & Crissey, 2010). The percentage of students who voted for Barack Obama (84%) is much higher than the two-thirds of the vote he received from 18-29 year olds in the general population (CIRCLE, 2008). Not unexpectedly, likely due both to age constraints and patterns of lower midterm and primary election participation, substantially fewer sampled students reported voting in elections prior to 2008 (37%) or during the 2008 primary season (35%). The 2008 primary/caucus participation rate is equivalent to the rate identified for college students nationally by Harvard’s Institute of Politics (2008), but it exceeds the 2008 rate of primary voting by young voters under 30 in all states except for New Hampshire (Kirby, Marcelo, Gillerman, & Linkins, 2008). Although our pre-2008 findings are limited, just 3.1% of the sample was too young to vote, in the sample report voting prior to 2008 at a rate that is higher than the 25% of 18-29 year olds nationally who voted in the 2006 midterm elections (Marcelo, 2008).

Measures

Participation Measures. Fourteen behavioral items were included in our analyses, and all use a 5-point Likert scale to capture responses. Each question, posed at Time 2, asked about participation “between the first 2008 Presidential debate and Election Day 2008.” Table 1 lists the specific wording for each of these questions and for others fielded in the two surveys. Results from a confirmatory factor analysis do not support the two-factor structure we initially expected to distinguish between behaviors that are electoral in nature and expressive “political voice” behaviors that occur outside the electoral realm (Zukin et al., 2006). However, we conducted a principal components analysis using a varimax rotation that yielded two new factors: political interest and political activism. These factors offer a meaningful distinction among possible participatory behaviors; they focus on the level of commitment required, rather than on the orientation of the behavior.

A composite political interest factor score (α=.81), created from six items in Table 1, measures expressions of attachment to, and desire to learn more about, a candidate(s). A composite political activism factor score (α=.80), created from seven items, measures committed political involvement on behalf of an issue or a candidate. One item, “attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate,” is cross-loaded on both the political interest and political activism factors. Deletion was considered; however, this item was retained in both factors both because it shares conceptual meaning with both constructs and inclusion increases Chronbach’s alpha for both factors. Two additional items were treated as separate dependent variables in multivariate analyses. One, community activism, examines working with a group to solve a community problem; for students, this may reflect work with a group of friends, through a campus or community-based religious organization, or with a campus student organization to address a community need. For example, students might work together to renovate a community center or to provide tax preparation assistance to residents of an impoverished community. The other, consumer politics, examines purchasing decisions made in light of a company’s conduct or values. These two items reflect the “self-actualizing” lifestyle politics behavior that Bennett et al. (2009) describe.

Rates and average participation frequency for the four dependent variables – political interest, political activism, community activism, and consumer politics – are presented in Table 1. At least 50% of students engaged in political interest behaviors during the 2008 general election season. Among students represented in this category of political participation, the most common forms are paying attention to political campaigns and using the Internet to research a candidate’s positions or speeches. Students engage in community
Table 1. Variable Descriptions and Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>In what month and year were you born?</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>What is your sex?</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>What racial or ethnic group best describes you?</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>Black=16.6%, Asian=15.5%, Hispanic=3.1%, White=60.7%, Other=4.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Where did you grow up mostly?</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>Rural area=9.0%, suburban area=75.5%, urban area=15.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Identification</td>
<td>Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else?</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>Republican=11.0%, Democrat=62.5%, Independent=26.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>Generally speaking, how would you describe your political ideology?</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>Very conservative=.3%, Conservative=6.9%, Moderate=36.4%, Liberal=43.1%, Very liberal=13.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Vote</td>
<td>Who did you vote for in the Presidential election?</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>Barack Obama=84.1%, John McCain=15.0%, Other=.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>Did you use the Internet to research a candidate’s positions or speeches by a candidate?</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Yes=94.7%, No=5.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you try to talk to people and explain why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>Yes=78.7, No=21.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate?</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>Yes=53.2%, No=46.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Activism</td>
<td>Did you contribute money to a candidate or party?</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>Yes=24.1%, No=75.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you work or volunteer on a political campaign for a candidate or party?</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Yes=22.9%, No=77.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you express your views about politics on a website, blog, chatroom?</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>Yes=26.8%, No=73.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you contact a newspaper, radio, or TV talk show to express your opinion on an issue?</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>Yes=10.6%, No=89.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you participate in political activities such as protests, marches, or demonstrations?</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>Yes=27.4%, No=72.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you contact or visit someone in the government who represents your community?</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>Yes=15.0%, No=85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you attend any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular candidate?</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>Yes=53.2%, No=46.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Activism</td>
<td>Did you work with a group to solve a problem in a community?</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>Yes=54.1%, No=45.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Politics</td>
<td>Did you make a purchasing decision based on the conduct or values of a company?</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>Yes=55.6%, No=44.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Instruction</td>
<td>At a college or university, have you taken a class on government, politics, or civic education?</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>Yes=39.4%, No=61.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course-Based Discussion
At a college or university, have you had discussions in any of your classes about the Presidential election? (N=445) Yes=71.2%, No=28.8%

Service Learning
Have you participated in a service learning project or program? (N=690) Yes=40.1%, No=59.9%

Community Service
Have you ever participated in any community service or volunteer activity? (1=Never, 5=Very often) (N=748) Mean=3.74, SD=.89

Parental Engagement
My parents encourage me to express my opinions about politics and current events even if they are different from their views. (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree) (N=706) Mean=3.94, SD=1.24

Peer Engagement
My friends encourage me to express my opinions about politics and current events even if they are different from their views. (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree) (N=717) Mean=3.77, SD=1.11

Personal Contact
In 2008, were you contacted by someone personally to work for or contribute money to a candidate, party, or any other organization that supports candidates? (N=442) Yes=60.6%, No=39.4

Election Behavior
Were you encouraged by anyone to vote in the 2008 Presidential election? (N=454) Yes=99.3%, No=.7%

Were you encouraged by anyone to vote for a specific candidate in the 2008 Presidential election? (N=451) Yes=95.1%, No=4.9%

Not including the 2008 primary and general elections, have you ever voted in a local, state, or national election? (N=753) Yes=37.3%, No=62.7
activism or consumer politics less frequently than they participate in many of the political interest behaviors, but more so than they participate in any of the political activism behaviors. With the exception of attending political events (cross-loaded onto the political interest factor as well), fewer than 30% of respondents participate in each political activism behavior, and the mean frequency is below 1.60 on a 5-point scale. Particularly low involvement is shown in results from two measures of activism: contacting media to express an opinion and contacting a representative in government.

**Civic Influences.** Our analysis includes measures of four education-based civic influences: civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussion, community service, and service learning. A dichotomous civic instruction measure captures student enrollment in courses with an explicit civic purpose at Time 2, as indicated in Table 1. The single-item measure asked, “At a college or university, have you taken a class on government, politics, or civic education?” A dichotomous deliberative course-based discussion measure captures exposure to classroom-based discussions of current events, also at Time 2. This item specifically asked students, “At a college or university, have you had discussions in any of your classes about the Presidential election?”

At Time 1, a community service frequency measure asked, “Have you ever participated in any community service or volunteer activity? By volunteer activity, we mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay.” This item was measured with a 5-point scale, possible response options range from “Never” to “Very Often”. A dichotomous service learning measure included at Time 1 asked respondents, “Have you participated in a service learning project or program? By service learning, we mean volunteer activity in conjunction with your coursework or other academic studies.”

**Control Variables.** Ten demographic and politically-oriented variables are included as controls in the analyses. Age, gender, and race each have been associated with youth participation (e.g., Lopez & Kirby, 2005; Marcelo, Lopez, & Kirby, 2007; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1994; Taft, 2006; Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2007). Parental engagement and peer engagement may also help foster youth political knowledge, identity, and behavior (McDevitt, 2006; McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007). Direct mobilization may have a particularly salient influence on students’ political participation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Three dichotomous variables capture specific outreach to seek students’ political participation. The personal contact item asked respondents, “In 2008, were you contacted by someone personally to work for or contribute money to a candidate, party, or any other organization that supports candidates?” The 2008 encouragement variable asked respondents, “In 2008, were you encouraged by anyone to vote in the 2008 Presidential election?” The specific encouragement item asked respondents, “In 2008, were you encouraged by anyone to vote for a specific candidate in the 2008 Presidential election?”

Finally, the model includes a control for prior voting activity, as initial political activity may be linked with subsequent activity (e.g., Plutzer, 2002). A dichotomous measure of voting before 2008, asked, “Not including the 2008 primary and general elections, have you ever voted in a local, state, or national election?” It should be noted that this variable introduces some error into the analysis, as 25.5% of the sample was 18 years old at the time of the November 2008 election. A final dichotomous question measures voting in a 2008 primary election.

**Results**

Separate multiple regression analyses (see Table 2) assessed the strength of each dependent variable’s relationships with the four educationally-based civic influences. Control variables are entered into each regression model. Because of missing responses to integral variables, sample sizes across the four models range from N = 336 to N = 344.

Regression results indicate that the political interest model explains 26% of the model variance (F(17, 318)=7.766, p=.000). Two civic influences are associated with increased political interest frequency: civic instruction (B=0.355, p<.01) and deliberative course-based discussion (B=0.296, p<.01). Two other variables also are significantly associated with political interest frequency: parental engagement (B=.180, p<.001) and personal contact mobilization (B=.600, p<.001).

The political activism model explains 20% of the model variance (F(17, 323)=5.924, p=.000). Two civic influences are associated with increased frequency of engagement in political activism: civic instruction (B=0.418, p<.001) and deliberative course-based discussions (B=0.264, p<.05). Additionally, when controlling for other variables in the model, student mobilization through personal contact (B=.462, p<.001) and voting in a primary or caucus (B=.358, p<.01) are associated with increased engagement in political activism.

The model for community activism explains just 9% of the model variance (F(17, 326)=2.883,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Interests</th>
<th>Political Activism</th>
<th>Community Activism</th>
<th>Consumer Politics</th>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>341</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>342</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.007</td>
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<td>Model Fit</td>
<td>F(17,318)=7.766, p=.000</td>
<td>f(17,323)=5.924, p=.000</td>
<td>F(17,326)=2.883, p=.000</td>
<td>F(17,324)=1.151, p=.304</td>
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</table>

| Civic Instruction            | B=.355**, β=.170    | B=.418***, β=.198  | B=-.011, β=.004    | B=.051, β=.019    |
| Deliberative Discussion      | B=.296**, β=.131    | B=.264*, β=.115    | B=.043, β=.015     | B=.174, β=.061    |
| Service Learning             | B=-.035, β=-.017    | B=.166, β=.078     | B=.061, β=.023     | B=.003, β=.001    |
| Community Service            | B=.044, β=.038      | B=.095, β=.082     | B=.442***, β=.304  | B=.076, β=.052    |
| Parental Engagement          | B=.180***, β=.218   | B=.050, β=.060     | B=.032, β=.031     | B=.047, β=.045    |
| Peer Engagement              | B=.019, β=.020      | B=-.023, β=-.023   | B=.012, β=.085     | B=.063, β=.052    |
| Personal Contact             | B=.600***, β=.284   | B=.462***, β=.216  | B=.208, β=.078     | B=.354, β=.132    |
| 2008 Encouragement           | B=.044, β=.002      | B=.275, β=.014     | B=1.851, β=.077    | B=.058, β=.002    |
| Specific Encouragement       | B=.371, β=.072      | B=.013, β=.003     | B=.005, β=.001     | B=.159, β=.024    |
| Vote Before 2008             | B=.095, β=.045      | B=.085, β=.040     | B=.022, β=.008     | B=.083, β=.031    |
| Vote 2008 Primary            | B=.188, β=.090      | B=.358**, β=.169   | B=.031, β=.012     | B=.052, β=.020    |
| Age                          | B=-.020, β=-.024    | B=.060, β=-.071    | B=.052, β=.050     | B=.025, β=.023    |
| Gender (Female)              | B=.089, β=.042      | B=.001, β=.001     | B=.062, β=.023     | B=.217, β=.081    |
| Race (Black)                 | B=.113, β=.038      | B=-.026, β=-.009   | B=.230, β=.063     | B=.184, β=.050    |
| Race (Asian)                 | B=-.027, β=.009     | B=-.053, β=.018    | B=.050, β=.014     | B=.309, β=.084    |
| Race (Hispanic)              | B=.106, β=.016      | B=.205, β=.030     | B=.320, β=.035     | B=.274, β=.030    |
| Race (Other)                 | B=-.088, β=-.018    | B=-.007, β=-.001   | B=.116, β=.018     | B=.051, β=.008    |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Community service involvement is significantly associated with an increased frequency of engagement in community activism (B=0.442, p<.001). No significant association is found between consumer politics and any of the four civic influences (F(17, 324)=1.151, p=.304).

Discussion

These results suggest potential avenues through which universities might encourage student political behavior, and they provide insight into how students behave politically. As discussed below, we find that three of the four educationally-based civic influences – civic instruction, deliberative course-based discussions, and community service – may be linked with college student civic involvement. It should be noted that the research design precludes identification of causal relationships. Civic-minded students may, in fact, be more likely than other students to seek out civic education opportunities. In fact, the level of political participation among students in this sample, a level higher than that among youth in the general population, suggests that the sample members may be more civically inclined than their counterparts in the general population.

Civic Influences

Higher education institutions may be able to help shape student civic involvement through both classroom-based and extracurricular activity. Structured opportunities for civic instruction and deliberative course-based discussions may be particularly beneficial in efforts to strengthen the extent to which students pay attention to candidates’ words and actions, actively demonstrate support for candidates, and engage in political activism. Classroom content that is explicitly political may elicit committed political action; however, such opportunities should not be limited to political science classes that may only serve a subset of a university’s student population.

Although classroom-based civic influences are linked with political interest and activism, the influences do not appear to be associated with the frequency of community activism. Consistent with a hypothesized “substitution effect” (e.g., Walker, 2000), the results indicate that community service is linked with increased community participation. Integrating service opportunities on campus may positively affect students’ civic behavior (Galston, 2001; Keen & Hall, 2008, 2009).

Our findings identify an additional avenue by which universities might facilitate student political participation. Specifically, creating and supporting opportunities for personal contact, wherein campaign representatives or peers directly ask students to volunteer or contribute to a campaign, also may facilitate political interest and activism. This does not require a university to prioritize specific political candidates or parties, only that a university enable such contacts across the political spectrum. Although our study participants appear to be more civically engaged than the general college-age population (Harvard IOP, 2008), expanding the availability of these civic influences may facilitate participation among youth with little prior political experience (Colby et al., 2007). Future research can seek to reduce self-selection bias and target a less elite sample of students.

College Students’ Political Behavior

Consistent with Beaumont et al.’s (2006) argument that focusing on voting limits our understanding of the myriad ways in which young adults express themselves politically, we also examine students’ participation in a broad range of political behaviors. Although prior research distinguishes traditional electorally-based behaviors from more expressive civic behaviors (Bennett et al., 2009; Zukin et al., 2006), our factor analysis suggests a stronger division along the extent of commitment that each behavior requires. Two solid factors emerge: behaviors that exhibit political interest and those that require a more sustained commitment to political involvement through activism. Substantial differences in how youth engage in these two categories of behavior suggest that the two groupings may provide a meaningful way to understand the diverse forms of modern youth political behavior.

This sample is highly engaged in political interest behaviors, proactively seeking out information necessary to make political decisions. Almost every student in this sample paid attention to the political campaigns taking place during fall 2008, and nearly the whole sample used the Internet to research candidates’ positions or speeches. Once a student selects a candidate to support (most in this sample supported Barack Obama), he or she exhibits continued interest in supporting the candidate, persuading others to vote for the candidate, joining a social networking group, attending events on behalf of a candidate, and displaying campaign paraphernalia. Although campaigns specifically targeted youth for mobilization in the 2008 election, future research should examine whether political interest behaviors remain high among youth.
youth during subsequent elections. Political behaviors requiring a sustained or intense level of commitment were much rarer. Interestingly, while students are less likely to engage in community activism or consumer politics than to express political interest, they are more likely to engage in all three of these activity forms than to participate in political activism. Just over a quarter of this sample participated in political activism by engaging in group-based activities such as protests, marches, and demonstrations or by individually expressing political views on the Internet. Students infrequently contact media or a government representative to express opinions on specific policy or political issues (only 10-15% report doing so). Our findings indicate that similar civic influences — civic instruction, classroom-based deliberative discussion — as well as personal contact mobilization are associated with both political interest and political activism. This suggests while higher education institutions can facilitate political activism, factors external to students’ educational environment may contribute to comparatively low rates of political activism. Findings from this particular study may in part reflect less focus on issue-oriented behaviors in the context of an election where individual characteristics of the presidential and vice presidential candidates (particularly Barack Obama and Sarah Palin) received substantial media and popular attention.

Increases in voting by youth in presidential elections (CIRCLE, 2013) suggest room for continued expansion of youth voting if higher education makes a commitment to support and encourage student participation. These data support the growing calls for higher education institutions to develop citizenship among students (Bok, 2006; Colby et al., 2007). Universities are well-positioned to reach this population and have the capacity to strengthen student orientations toward active citizenship. Our findings indicate that colleges and universities may be able to strengthen such orientations by integrating civic influences into curricular and extra-curricular offerings.

Conclusion

Politically engaged youth are likely to continue political participation as adults (Flanagan, 2009; Plutzer, 2002; Wattenberg, 2008). Thus, increasing political engagement among college students may lay the groundwork for increases in the size of the pool of active adult citizens and may shape future trends in American political participation (Flanagan, 2009; Wattenberg, 2008). A concerted effort to foster college student political engagement may facilitate continued growth in youth political involvement. Promoting a campus environment in which students are encouraged to take courses on government and politics — one in which deliberative discussion and service involvement are prioritized — may contribute to a more engaged citizenry. Furthermore, universities can facilitate and support student contact with campaigns and candidates across the political spectrum. Yet, since relationships vary among the civic influences and the political behaviors examined in this study, campus administrators and faculty should make conscious decisions about the types of civic behavior that their institution wants to promote, with an education that integrates a diverse set of influences offering the most potential for success in developing fully engaged citizens.

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Tarrance Group, Alexandria, VA.


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Fostering Individual and School Resilience: When Students at risk Move from Receivers to Givers

Jane L. Newman and John Dantzler

As a low-income black male, the odds were stacked against me growing up. From an absent biological father who took no interest in his son to a mother drowned in work to support her family, the idea of a college degree was not a reality for me. When I was in fifth grade, my self-esteem and any sense of purpose that I had as a 10-year-old boy were crushed. I remember staring at a crumbling ceiling tile in my elementary school’s counselor’s office, as my fifth grade teacher told me, “You will never amount to anything, and you will never thrive in any school setting.” The implication of her words became extremely evident in my actions from that moment on. From a steep academic decline to severe behavioral problems, it was the new norm for teachers to write me off as “troubled” and as a kid who “could not be helped.” It was a norm I accepted, embodied and BELIEVED! (Aaron, University of Alabama Premier Award Essay, 2015).

Five decades of social science research have characterized poverty as the factor most likely to put individuals at risk for failure in school, and later, for not reaching their potential in life. Though well intentioned to secure critical human welfare services for families, schools, and communities, the poverty at-risk focus, unfortunately, may have done more damage than good by leading to harmful educational practices such as lowering expectations, tracking, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Current, rigorous studies are focusing on research and practice that result in successful learning and healthy development by identifying students’ strengths as capacity building factors that can transform capabilities into resilience attributes (Benard, 2014).

Although it has been researched for some 70 years in the medical field and since 1970 in the behavioral sciences (Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten & Obradovic, 2006), resilience is quite an ambiguous construct. Resilience has been studied in K–12 education for the past 30 years; however, although service learning and its effect on academic engagement and civic responsibility have been studied considerably, little is known about the relationship between service learning and resilience. This research gap is due to research not measuring up to quality standards and to very few research studies having been conducted on the subject. In addition, teachers who implement K-12 service learning may think that research and writing for publication requires too much time, or that it is too difficult a task to tackle. However, if we fail to address why some at-risk children become successful and some never achieve their potential in school, and later in life, we may continue to lose many of these students who could experience resilience through researched interventions and ultimately make positive contributions to society.

Resilience Research

There is no single definition of resilience. On the contrary, many definitions and explanations have been suggested in the literature. For example, Rutter (1981, 1984) and Doll and Lyon (1988) defined resilience as a response to risk, or an adjustment to negative life events (Rutter, 1987). In addition, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994) defined academic resilience as the likelihood of success in school and in other accomplishments in spite of adversities. Children who overcome adversity in spite of numerous obstacles are identified as resilient, having innate abilities that interact with positive environmental protective supports (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

In seminal research in the area of at-risk behavior, pioneer researchers and educators identified risk factors (children’s weak innate traits and negative environmental factors) as signs of trouble and as predictors of poor life outcomes. During the second period of more positive resilience research, rigorous longitudinal studies tracked individuals to adulthood with findings demonstrating that 50–70% of high-risk children developed into healthy successful adults (Frymier, 1992; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992). Developmental resilience was described as a positive process through which some children who experienced stress and hardships developed competency and success in spite of
experiencing adverse risky situations. Studies focused on determining processes in which innate and positive environmental protective factors were associated with resilience (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). The third period of resilience research focused on promoting resilience through prevention, intervention, and policy (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). McMillan and Reed (1994) described their theory for how resilience evolves by suggesting that at-risk resilient children also have innate personality attributes and traits that contribute to their academic success and healthy development, whatever risk factors their background or set of circumstances may present. They also posit that there are specific interventions, especially in schools, that can foster resilience.

*Personal Innate Characteristics of Resilient Children*

Further studies (Benard, 1991; Benard, 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1984, 1985, 1986; Werner, 1984; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993) have identified developmental personality factors that separate resilient children from those who succumb to risk factors.

Benard (1996) listed these personal strengths:

- Social competence: empathy, communication skills, humor, cross cultural competence;
- Sense of autonomy/identity: self-efficacy, internal locus of control, mastery, self-awareness, detaching from negative situations;
- Sense of purpose/belief in bright future: a special interest, imagination, goal, direction, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, persistence, optimism, spiritual connectedness, sense of meaning.

According to Henderson (2003, 2007, 2013), resilient individuals do not have to possess all of the aforementioned traits, but, usually upon reflection can identify three or four attributes that have been significant in their transformation from at risk to resilient.

*Environmental Protective Factors*

In addition to the innate or personal attributes, current researchers agree that there are also environmental protective support factors that appear to alter and sometimes even reverse effects of risk. These environmental factors enable children to transform adversity into resilience at school and later, to success as adults (McMillan & Reed, 1994; O’Dougherty Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012; Walsh, 2012). Benard (2007) identified three main categories of environmental protective factors:

1. Close caring relationships with “compassion, understanding, respect, and interest …grounded in listening…that establish safety and basic trust” (p. 20). These relationships can include a parent or a teacher, counselor, school administrator who also can serve as a role model or mentor.
2. High expectations “communicate not only firm guidance, structure, and challenge but also, and most importantly, convey a belief in the youth’s innate resilience and look for strengths and assets as opposed to problems and deficits” (p. 20).
3. Meaningful “participation and contribution…valued responsibilities…making decisions…giving voice and being heard…contributing one’s talents to the community”(p. 20), particularly in middle school adolescence.

This third environmental factor is exactly a description of the highest level of service learning.

*Recent Advances in Resilience Research*

Current researchers believe resilience is more than just being sure a child’s positive innate traits and protective factors outweigh risks and negative environmental influences. For the past two decades, researchers have agreed that resilience refers to the capacity of all individuals to progress, in spite of risks, toward resilient outcomes. Instead of situating risk in youth and their families, current resilience research situates risk within a broader social context, such as racism, war, and poverty (Benard, 2014). Current resilience research grounds research and practice in optimism for building motivation; positive expectations internalized in youth may motivate them and teach them to overcome risks and adversity (Benard, 2014). Still, the critical question remains: Why do some individuals succeed in school and life, while others fail to reach their potential in school, and later in life?

According to Benard (2014), the development of resilience is the same process as healthy human development. Current resiliency research addresses basic human needs for love, connectedness, and meaningful involvement, a dynamic process where personality and positive environmental processes interact in a reciprocal transformational relationship.
Teachers and Schools Transforming Lives

Teachers. Although teachers may not know it, research demonstrates that they have the power to change at-risk behavior into resilient behavior in children by meeting basic needs of safety, love, and belonging (Benard, 1991). These “special” teachers can provide caring relationships (Higgins, 1994), positive and high expectations (Delpit, 1996), and opportunities that turn around their students by letting them express opinions, make choices, solve problems, and work with and help others. Example:

I was the only African American student at my high school. My assistant principal became the first educator who believed in me. Her intervention caused my self-esteem and attitude toward classes, grades, peers, and superiors to change. In addition, since my high school was small, I had the same English teacher for three years, for English, Advanced English, and AP English. My teacher not only believed in me, but also took care of me as if I were one of her own children. Every day when she bought her school lunch, she paid for mine, too. After school, she took me home with her children to do my homework and to eat dinner with her family. During my senior year in high school, I was elected president of my class. When I applied to The University of Alabama where I was accepted to the state’s flagship University in 2011, my English teacher paid my application fee (Aaron, 2015).

Caring relationships from administrators, teachers, counselors, and coaches can serve as buffers for students at risk. Resilient children often have several mentors who have a great impact on their ability to develop positively through conveying understanding, compassion, interest, and trust (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Schools. Beyond individual characteristics of children and the impact that supportive family protective factors have on resilience, researchers have also begun to pay attention to ways schools may affect student academic resilience. School environments are already designed to provide “protective factors” that appear to alter or reverse potential risks/negative outcomes and foster natural resiliency in children (Benard, 2014; Henderson & Milstein, 2002). When a school promotes a culture where all students’ basic needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, motivation for learning is improved and students feel that they have a place in society (Benard, 1996). Certain practices such as asking questions that require critical thinking about current social issues, designing learning experiences that are hands-on and that employ cooperative approaches such as cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring and community service give students opportunities to share their gifts to give back to their school or community and foster all traits of resilience (Benard, 1996). Such experiences represent the highest levels of service learning and community engagement. While creating informal helping opportunities in the classroom is critical to creating the value of caring, programmatic approaches that are particularly effective in producing positive development outcomes include peer helping, community engagement, and service learning (Melchior, 1998; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Slavin, 1990).

Service Learning

Service learning is a programmatic method of teaching and learning that offers a unique opportunity for young people to apply knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom to solve real-life community problems and develop real-world services that benefit society. Learning conditions can be designed to teach students to become producers of knowledge, not just consumers of information. Research documents that quality service-learning experiences can positively impact student participants in a number of ways, such as improving: (a) academic outcomes, including students’ academic performance and engagement; (b) civic responsibility; (c) self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resiliency; and (d) career choices. In order to produce positive impacts, however, the service-learning experiences must be high-quality experiences that meet quality service-learning standards (Billig, 2000; Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Furco, 2002; National Youth Leadership Council, 2010).

The National Youth Leadership Council (2010) developed a set of quality indicators for service learning called “K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice” to improve the uniformity and rigor of these experiences as an instructional practice. Quality programs must maintain high standards in the following areas: linking projects to curriculum; incorporating meaningful service; maintaining duration and intensity (70–80 hours of service learning); understanding diversity; incorporating youth voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating their respective projects; collaborating and working with community partners; employing
reflection that incorporates higher-order thinking skills and/or technology before, during, and after activities; and consistently monitoring progress throughout the project.

Science in Action: An Example of High-Quality Service Learning

Science in Action is a four-year service-learning project funded by the CNCS to support Georgia and Alabama high poverty middle schools in their development of innovative service-learning STEM projects. CNCS awarded a grant of $675,631 to the University of Alabama College of Education to oversee and fund 20 projects for middle schools in high poverty areas that met criteria of 50% or more free and reduced-priced lunches. More than 6,000 students, 100 teachers and 120 community partners were engaged in the projects. The goals focused on improving students’ academic engagement, civic responsibility, and resiliency for at-risk behaviors. Teachers worked with colleagues and experts to expand their pedagogical knowledge base and instructional strategies to facilitate STEM-related (inquiry-based science) service learning and community engagement projects to address real problems in their schools and communities. Schools were expected to uphold standards, as described in the “K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice.” In the Science in Action’s high-quality implemented programs, for example, students’ service-learning projects included action-oriented experiences such as:

1. Creating museum displays to demonstrate what students learned instead of passively taking tests covering content.
2. Studying the relationships of carcinogenic agents in all types of water sources in an Alabama county that has the highest cancer rate in the state.
3. Working with the city to develop a community park with an amphitheater that the school and community share.
4. Focusing on child obesity and poor exercise to turn around an entire school and community where individuals have changed their eating exercise habits and becoming a charter school.
5. Studying causes and treatment of cancer and providing an awareness session for over 500 community members and participating in a Relay for Life fundraiser.
6. Study extreme weather and developing kits filled with weather radios, flashlights, batteries, water, and directions for finding safety, etc. Students presented a community awareness session and distributed weather boxes prior to the April 27 tornadoes that killed more than 200 Alabama citizens. Loss of lives in one particular rural town was only 2, compared to 35 deaths in the community just a few miles down the road. Officials attributed the low death rate to the student’s weather kits and awareness session presented just a week before the tornadoes struck the area.

I have been awarded “Best Teacher” in Breakthrough Miami, one of the “Top 10 U.S. Internships,” as rated by U.S. News and World Report (http://usnews.rankingandreviews.com/best/internship-programs) I developed a leadership program for the Boys and Girls Clubs of North Alabama. I took this program to Serbia (through the UA Exchange Student Program), and the U.S. State Department presented me the International Exchange Alumni Award. Recognizing my work, the director of U.S. diplomats wants to see me in Foreign Service once I graduate from UA (Aaron, 2015).

Method

A retrospective design was used to assess the potential effect of high-quality service-learning/community engagement projects on measures of student resiliency. Over the course of the four-year period, half of the 20 schools that received funding in the Science in Action project completed most of the required elements of six formative evaluations. The 10 schools that consistently met the requirements based on the eight K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice (see http://www.nylc.org/k-12-service-learning-standards-quality-practice) were then divided into low-quality implementers and high-quality implementers. These groups were determined by two evaluators’ rating the quality of each school’s service-learning program, using Liptrot’s (2010) evaluation instrument that includes the eight quality service-learning standards. Evaluators were required to maintain a minimum of 85% inter-rater reliability for each survey question.

As an evaluation component of the Science in Action Project, service-learning teachers were asked to administer a series of end-of-year instruments to the students, one of which, Learn and Serve America: Resilience Student Survey, Grades 6-12,
was designed to assess resiliency. This instrument was developed jointly by Shelley Billig and the Corporation for National and Community Service (2008) and the instrument was targeted for this study due to the student- and school-based questions. Six items are theoretically related to a student resiliency construct; there are also 11 items related to school factors that are associated with resiliency. As a precursor for using the summative score of these items as measures of resiliency, factor analysis techniques were employed to assess the six resiliency items as representative of a single construct and the 11 school factor items as a representation of a single construct. Upon assessment of evidence of construct validity, the summative scores of the personal resiliency and school factors scales were used as dependent variables. Analysis of differences in student personal resiliency scores and school-based factors associated with resiliency by quality of service-learning experience were then conducted.

Participants

The resiliency instrument was administered at 20 schools to a total sample of 1,669 students after participating in a school-specific year-long service-learning project. Given the retrospective nature of the data, a random sample of 336 students who participated in high-quality implementation of service-learning projects and a random sample of 336 students randomly selected from low-quality service-learning projects were drawn for analysis for a total sample size of 672. A power analysis using G*Power 3.0 indicated that the total sample of 672 corresponds to power of .99 to detect a moderate effect (d = .5) between two groups using an .05 alpha level. The demographic categories of gender, free or reduced lunch status, and race/ethnicity were compared to evaluate demographic differences between the groups of students from low and high-quality implementing service-learning programs. There was no statistically different distribution between the groups for gender ($\chi^2 = 0.94$, df=1, p=.33) or free/reduced lunch status ($\chi^2 = 0.35$, df=1, p=.55), but there was a statistically different distribution in the case of gender/ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 68.7$, df=3, p < .001). The high-quality implementing group was represented by a larger percentage of African American and Hispanic students than the low-quality implementing group (Table 1).

Construct Validity of the Scales

A psychometric analysis of the six resiliency-based item and the 11 school-based items from the instrument was conducted to ensure that there was evidence of construct validity for the two scales. The items were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with the item statement. The total sample of 1,669 students was used in an exploratory factor analysis. Given the ordinal nature of the Likert-type data, the polychoric correlation matrix was utilized in a minimum rank factor analysis extraction to determine the best factor structure for both scales. The FACTOR (ver. 9.3) program was used to conduct the exploratory factor analysis. A parallel analysis using the Timmerman and Lorenzo-Seva (2011) method indicated that the six resiliency questions formed a unidimensional scale consisting of a single factor, and the 11 school-based factors items formed a unidimensional scale consisting of a single factor. The single resiliency factor explained 53.7% of the variance in the six items. Factor loadings from .530 to .823 indicated good to strong loading for the items. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .82 indicating good internal consistency (Table 2). In terms of the school-based factors items, the single factor explained 58.3% of the variance in the 11 items with factor loadings from .58 to .83. Cronbach’s alpha for the school-based factors scale was .93 indicating strong internal consistency (Table 3). Both the student factors associated with the resiliency scale, and the school-based factors associated with resiliency scale have strong evidence of construct validity and internal consistency.

Results

Comparison between groups of students representing the low- and high-quality service-learning implementers was conducted using independent t-tests. Two dependent variables – student resiliency and school-based resiliency factors – were calculated from the instrument results. There was a significant difference between students in low and high implementing schools in student resiliency scores, t=3.32, df=635.3, p=.001, d=.26. The average student personal resiliency score for students in the high group was 48.4 and for students in the low group was 47.9.

Table 1. Demographic Statistics of Students in the Low- and High-Performing Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Low Performing (%)</th>
<th>High Performing (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Lunch</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>68.70</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=336)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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(\(M=20.5\)) was significantly higher than the scores for students in the low group (\(M=19.6\)). Similarly, with regard to school-based resiliency factors, there was a significant difference in scores between students in the low-quality implementing groups and high-quality implementing groups, \(t=4.80, df=669, p<.001, d=.37\). Students representing the low performing schools indicated lower levels of school-based resiliency factors in their school (\(M=32.6\)) than those representing high performing schools (\(M=34.8\)).

**Discussion**

Although there is very little research literature related to service-learning and community engagement programs that include high-quality implementation of service-learning standards, researchers have indicated that increased levels of knowledge and understanding in academic engagement, civic responsibility, and resilience are more likely to be reached when service-learning programs meet high standards (Billig, 2010). The present study explored differences in student resilience and students’ perceptions of school-based factors affecting resilience between high- and low-quality implementation of service learning/community engagement programs. The findings suggest that in schools where service-learning/community engagement programs uphold the Service-Learning Quality Standards (NYLC, 2010) as measured by Liptrot’s (2010) evaluation instrument, students’ scores of personal resilience and perceptions of school-based factors affecting resilience (see Table 4) were significantly higher than those participating in service-learning programs not meeting these standards.

This study suggests that the foundation from which to start building students’ abilities is for caring adults in their schools and lives to believe that every student has innate resilience (see items in Table 2). Studies related to the factors that assist students at risk to become resilient may further explain how to foster such qualities in students whose adversities are preventing them from succeeding in school or in life. One way to support children at risk is to examine the construct of resilience. By thoroughly understanding the history and components of resilience (Zoloskis & Bullock, 2012), educators can help students develop the particular personal resilience, innate traits, or coping skills that enable them to transform from “service receivers” to “service givers.” These traits are present in early childhood and may be further developed in adolescence if they interact with positive environmental protective factors (Benard 2004, 2007) (see items in Table 3).

| Table 2. Factor Loadings and Communalities of Student Resilience Items (\(N=1,669\)) |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item                             | Mean    | SD      | Loading | Communality |
| I enjoy working together with students my age. | 3.21  | 0.80  | .60 | .49 |
| I can work with someone who has different opinions than mine. | 2.99  | 0.82  | .56 | .62 |
| I stand up for myself without putting others down. | 3.17  | 0.80  | .53 | .37 |
| I plan to graduate from high school. | 3.70  | 0.60  | .82 | .79 |
| I plan to go to college or some other school after high school. | 3.62  | 0.69  | .81 | .77 |
| I have goals and plans for the future. | 3.63  | 0.66  | .76 | .61 |

| Table 3. Factor Loadings and Communalities of School-Based Factors Related to Resiliency Items (\(N=1,669\)) |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Item                                             | Mean    | SD      | Loading | Communality |
| I do things at school that make a difference.     | 2.79  | 0.79  | .66 | .56 |
| At least one teacher or other adult at school believes in me. | 3.34  | 0.73  | .76 | .72 |
| The schoolwork I am assigned is meaningful and important. | 3.13  | 0.75  | .76 | .73 |
| I do interesting activities at school.            | 3.09  | 0.80  | .72 | .63 |
| At school, I help decide things like class activities and rules. | 2.44  | 0.92  | .58 | .73 |
| At least one teacher or adult at school listens to me when I have something to say. | 3.13  | 0.78  | .82 | .79 |
| At least one teacher or adult at school notices when I am not there. | 3.17  | 0.77  | .75 | .66 |
| At least one teacher or adult at school always wants me to do my best. | 2.96  | 0.84  | .75 | .76 |
| At least one teacher or adult at school listens to students’ ideas about how to improve the school. | 3.42  | 0.71  | .80 | .81 |
| At least one teacher or adult at school really cares about me. | 3.20  | 0.79  | .83 | .77 |
| The things I am learning in school will be important for my future. | 3.33  | 0.76  | .75 | .78 |

| Table 4. Differences in Resiliency Between Students in Low- and High-Performing Schools |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Measure                           | Low Performing Schools | High Performing Schools | Mean Diff | t | df | 95% CI of Mean Diff |
| Student Resiliency                | 19.6(3/7) | 20.5(2.9) | -0.86 | 3.32* | 635.3 | -1/4 tp 0/4 |
| School-Based Resiliency Factors   | 32/6(4/4) | 34/8(5.7) | -2/25 | 4.80* | 669 | -3.2 to -1.3 |

*p<.001

According to Rutter (1984), development of resilience is a result of “connectedness,” in which linkages happen between individuals and family, school, and community environments. When dysfunctional families do not provide children...
meaningful relationships, building positive environments in which children at risk can succeed in schools and communities are critical so that youth can experience mutually caring relationships that give meaning to their lives and provide opportunities for authentic involvement, i.e., a reason for caring and commitment to serve others (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992). Sergiovanni (1993) contends that the need for community is universal, and that adults must have experienced this kind of environment, if they are, in turn, to create opportunities for children to experience resilience.

Resilience research in K-12 education is relatively new. It focuses on practices that result in healthy development and successful learning despite risk factors and adversity (Werner, 2007). Resilience research provides educators a blueprint for creating schools with a healthy school climate where all students can thrive socially and academically (Perkins, 2006). Schools where basic human needs for support, respect, and growth are met, motivation for learning is fostered. Reciprocal caring, respectful, and participatory relationships are critical factors in determining whether a student learns, whether a program or strategy is successful, whether an educational change is sustained, and, ultimately, whether a student feels he has a place in society. By becoming more aware of environmental protective factors and making a commitment to strengthen them, teachers and schools can play a significant role in developing resilience (Henderson, 2003, 2007, 2013) by providing opportunities that promote real responsibility and real work (McLaughlin, et al., 1994).

Meaningful extracurricular programs, not just brief acts of kindness in the classroom, provide experiences that nurture self-esteem and give students experiences of required helpfulness, an environmental factor that may help to develop resilience. Teachers and administrators can help find community projects that provide a “fit” for students based on their interests. These experiences help to shape belief in self, which contributes to self-efficacy and transformation from at risk to resiliency.

Providing opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful involvement and responsibilities within the school and community environments is often an expected norm of schools that promote high expectations (Benard, 2014). Participation that stresses caring and respect is a fundamental human need; moreover, some education reformers believe that when schools ignore these basic needs, schools become alienating places (Sarason, 1993). Certain instructional practices such as cooperative learning, cross-age learning, and community service provide youth opportunities to give their gifts back to the school and community and, indeed, foster innate traits of resilience.

Personal strengths, coupled with healthy development and the opportunity to give back to the community (in this case, service-learning/community engagement is key), can cause a transformation in the child that produces social competence, problem-solving, goal setting, critical thinking, planning, resourcefulness, achievement motivation, and/or educational aspiration. Participation in high-quality service-learning projects may lead to success in achieving a tangible objective such as developing an outdoor classroom, a community garden, or a new museum school (an alternative education model where community professionals collaborate with students to create museum exhibits). At another level, students can experience empowerment by taking action toward a goal and reflecting on implications of the process. Neither empowerment nor resilience can be taught; they are a continuous function of multiple experiences leading to becoming a change agent (Stenhouse, Jarrett, Williams, & Chilungu, 2014) (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

While the results of this study should not be construed to suggest that high-quality service-learning programs cause student resilience, they do provide evidence of a connection between service learning/community engagement and resilience. Future experimental studies on the connection between high-quality service learning and resilience should attempt to isolate the direct effect of service learning/community engagement on resilience and the connection between student personal and school-based factors related to resilience and high-quality service learning.

A further contribution of this study to future research would be the establishment of evidence of validity for measures of student resilience and school-based factors affecting resilience. In addition, this study reopens the discussion about the relationship of service learning to resilience.

**Lessons Learned/Implications**

For the past 50 years, resilience research has provided many studies that demonstrate that some 50–70% of children – including those born in high-risk conditions such as dysfunctional families, crime, war, and poverty – can develop sufficient social competency to lead successful lives (Benard, 2014). These studies also agree that there are special
personal attributes and positive environment factors that are part of the process through which resilient youth develop.

This research and a review of the resilience research literature suggest a strategy of identifying positive strengths and environmental factors within families, schools, and communities rather than focusing on the negative high-risk conditions to which at-risk children are exposed. Future research should look at the children, families, schools, and communities as positives about future life that resilient youth internalize, which empower them to become successful in school and life (Benard, 2014). Further research is also warranted to determine the relationship between and among the relevant variables. The central questions for current resilience researchers are: How does the at-risk to resilience transformation in youth take place? When does it happen? Where does it occur? How and why does the process evolve?

Many service-learning studies have been conducted to determine if there is a relationship between quality service-learning programs and academic engagement and civic responsibility (Billig, 2010); however, research in this area is limited. As new rigorous studies are conducted, educators will come to understand the importance of high-quality programs and their relationship to improved personal and educational outcomes. It is well documented that schools are natural havens (Henderson, 2013) where students at risk can become involved in projects in which they identify and solve problems, a process that moves them from service receivers to service givers.

Resilience research calls for a nation’s dedication to and belief in its children and youth. It creates a mandate for social change. Instead of centering on risk in children, their homes, and communities, researchers instead should view children as positive resources with the potential to disprove the assumption that risk equals poverty and vice versa. Resilience scholars have an obligation to provide opportunities for youth to participate in the investigation of problems, planning, action, reflection, and evaluation/celebration, which are exactly the principles upon which service learning and community engagement are based. Educators must instill in their students hope for a future where all citizens are grounded in social and economic justice. Not only are educators nurturing healthy development and successful learning in at-risk students, but they are also creating inside-out social change by building the compassionate and creative citizenry critical to a welcoming and opportunity-filled world (Nelson & Sneller, 2011; Benard, 2014), one in which a student who was told as a child he would never succeed in a university setting but today is beating the odds, thriving on the campus where I am privileged to work.

References


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Extreme Make Over: Disposition Development of Pre-Service Teachers

Tynisha Meidl and Beth Baumann

Abstract

Pre-service teachers are on an educational and professional journey in which they are trying to figure out the “right stuff” needed to be an effective teacher while being a “student.” Many pre-service teachers engage in community service projects, yet it is unclear how these experiences inform the dispositional development of pre-service teachers. In this study, the authors examined the outcomes of a community service experience pre-service teachers (n = 20) participated in as part of the [student group]. The authors present the results of a qualitative study. Findings suggest pre-service teachers realize the multiplicities of student needs in an authentic setting and the potential disconnect between what is learned during one’s teacher education undergraduate program and the realities of being a teacher once employed as a classroom teacher. The authors conclude with reflections on the importance of having concrete ways for pre-service teachers to develop dispositions beyond the course-based field experiences and student teaching.

Introduction

In the field of education, there is no clear consensus on the specific behaviors of an effective teacher. As a means to define a set of behaviors or ways of acting, dispositions have been included as part of many teacher preparation programs. As a result, teacher preparation programs in the United States (US) have struggled to find concrete ways to develop, document, and assess dispositions (Borko, Liston, & Witcomb, 2007).

At the undergraduate level, many students are engaged in much more than just their coursework. Many students are involved in extra-curricular activities, which may or not be associated with their program of study. Community service is an experience that many undergraduates engage in during their undergraduate experience. Pre-service teachers are not exempt from these experiences. There is a limited body of research that attempts to explore community service as an alternative means for helping pre-service teachers develop teacher dispositions.

This paper examines how community service may serve as an opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop dispositions needed to be an effective teacher. The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-service teachers viewed community service as part of their teacher development specifically as it relates to dispositional development. The study also sought to understand how dispositions might be developed in a non-academic setting. Results from the study shed light on how to develop pre-service teacher dispositions beyond what can be accomplished through field experiences and student teaching. These findings contribute to our emerging understanding of how best to develop dispositions among pre-service teachers.

Dispositional Development in Teacher Education

The term “disposition,” is a fairly new term as applied to teacher education. It was not until the late 80’s and early 90’s that this term emerged. It is the goal of teacher education programs to foster existing behaviors, introduce new behaviors, or change existing behaviors of pre-service teachers. Dispositions are of importance because many students in teacher education programs are encouraged to think of themselves as pre-professionals and behave as such.

Dispositions are difficult to define because of their subjectivity. In 2000, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandated that teacher candidates completing an NCATE accredited program must acquire the “professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn” (www.ncate.org). NCATE (2002) defines dispositions as the beliefs that guide teachers’ attitudes and behaviors that affect student learning. Katz (1993) defines disposition as “a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed towards a broad goal” (p.1). In teacher education programs, the term disposition is equally equated to beliefs, values, and attitudes needed to be an effective teacher (Demmon-Berger, 1986; Mino, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James,
Dispositions are subjective and vary from program to program. The variance is dependent upon how programs define dispositions. Programs may view dispositions as a specific set of attitudes or beliefs, while others may categorize them as personality traits (Welch et al., 2010). Although NCATE does not specifically identify a set of dispositions some institutions name specific dispositions that pre-service teachers should embody. Many teacher education programs have identified dispositions to include all or some of a list proposed by Armstine (1990) which includes: fairness, decency, service, pro-social behavior, honesty, humility, trust, empathy, healing, and a sense of community. Naming dispositions provide pre-service teachers with terminology regarding the expected attitudes and behaviors exemplary teachers exhibit.

How are Dispositions Developed?

One of the goals of teacher education programs is to influence values and beliefs held by pre-service teachers regarding aspects related to the practice of teaching (Doyle, 1997). The most common ways programs have done this is through course-based field experiences and student teaching. Dispositions within these contexts are documented through observations done by cooperating teachers and college supervisors (Welch et al., 2010).

Students in many programs are also responsible for documenting their experiences and how they perceive their growth and development. The process of reflecting on one’s own growth and development is an identifiable disposition for some programs. Giovannelli (2003) studied being reflective as a disposition toward teaching. She found a reflective disposition has a positive correlation with effective teaching in the specific domains of “instructional behavior, classroom organization, and teacher expectations” (p.307). This self-reflective practice as one way to document dispositional development allows programs to have documented proof that dispositions of pre-service teachers change over time, using self-reflections as evidence of this change.

Field experiences and student teaching provide pre-service teachers with “real-time” classroom experience by placing the pre-service teacher in an actual classroom with the support of a cooperating teacher. Field experiences have been regarded as the most valuable component of teacher education programs (Adler, 1984; Griffin, 1989). As a result, every pre-service teacher candidate is required by law to perform a certain amount of field experience; student teaching is the most common form (Wade, 1997). The rationale for field experiences is grounded in the work of John Dewey (1910), who was a strong advocate for the experiential training of teachers. Field experiences challenge existing beliefs and values about teaching and learning pre-service teachers have held for the majority of their lifetime (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Pre-service teachers learn by doing (Erickson & Anderson, 2005). It is the responsibility of the teacher education program to provide experiences in the field and leverage other experiences and opportunities for students to challenge their own beliefs (Doyle, 1997). The search for additional and meaningful activities has lead many institutions of higher education to look towards service learning as a high-impact practice within teacher education programs. Voluntary non-class related community service, although sometimes misused interchangeably (Howard, 2001) with service-learning, may serve as another means to develop teacher dispositions beyond classroom activities and structured practicum experiences.

Community Service in Teacher Education

Community service projects have the ability to enhance student learning because they frequently address real community needs (Erickson and Anderson, 2005). De Acosta (1996) describes teaching and community involvement as a synergistic relationship. As a means to help students see the value in this relationship an increasing number of teacher educators and preparation programs encourage teacher candidates to spend time in the local community (deAcosta, 1996). In this study, community service is described as service or volunteer experiences pre-service teachers voluntarily choose. These experiences are school-based in nature. Pre-service teachers perform service projects and activities within the physical environment of a school such as painting and organizing classrooms or educational support in the form of tutoring students.
Community service does not have a prescribed learning agenda as a co-curricular activity (Howard, 2001). The voluntary characteristic of community service allows for students to choose activities and sites of interest. There is greater variation in the types of experiences students may have based on what they choose to do. Community service aids in developing pro-social behaviors such as: (1) responding to the needs of others, (2) learning more about being a caring person, and (3) creating situations for personal reflection and growth (Swick, 2001). According to Serow (1991) “participation in community service is associated with positive developmental outcomes, including an enhanced sense of responsibility and concern for others” (p. 544). Students may be drawn to certain types of activities based on their personality, morals, values, and beliefs, all of which inform dispositions (Welch et al., 2010).

Service experiences, in which students are working with their peers and community, within an educational setting are able to develop the desired dispositions to serve as agents of educational reform prior to entering the teaching profession (Erickson and Anderson, 2005), while gaining insight needed to build communities that support all people (Shore, 1999). Service challenges students to think deeply about issues impacting student learning as well as reflect on their beliefs and values within the context of teaching.

Recognizing the increased number of students engaging in community service at the undergraduate level, the authors sought to explore how community service projects served as a means to develop pre-service teacher dispositions. Specifically, the researchers analyzed the impetus for student involvement in this specific service experience and the relationship between the experience and participants’ professional development. The question informing the study is: To what extent do pre-service teachers ascribe the development of dispositions to community service?

**Method**

**Investigation Site and Participants**

“[The service project]” is a community service project done annually as a collaborative effort with undergraduate teacher education candidates across the Midwest. The student group hosts the event across the state, annually. This project seeks to beautify schools in need. Pre-service teachers engage in projects such as painting, landscaping, building shelves, sanding doors, refinishing walls, and other projects to “make-over” a school with minimal resources. [Service project] gives future educators “real experiences and opportunities to work with current educators, association members, and involved parents, while helping to create a bright and pleasant learning environment” ([Student group] personal communication, 2010). For example, prior to pre-service teachers arriving, the community raised $15,000 with the help of over 100 community members, 30-40 school staff, and parents. [Student group] raised $6000 to contribute to the beautification project as well.

Public schools throughout the state are eligible to apply. Schools are required to submit a paper application and a video or PowerPoint presentation to illustrate how the school will benefit from a beautification weekend. Before schools are chosen, the following is taken into account: the number and type of K-12 students the project would impact, the school’s current conditions, the impact of revenue controls, and whether they had enough projects to do that could sustain 150–180 people working for two days.

This research occurred during the 2009-2010 academic year. The two elementary schools chosen share many of the same key characteristics, showcasing their need for the additional help as indicated in their application. The two schools chosen were Title 1 schools with over 30% of the students at each school qualifying for free or reduced lunch programs; both schools reside in the same rural district serving a total of 905 students in four schools (NCES, 2010). The two elementary schools share similarities in both need and student body characteristics but their student body size is significantly different. One school serves kindergarten through fifth grade and the other kindergarten through second grade, with a student enrollment population of 373 and 35 students respectively.

During the time of study, the service project drew students from 21 colleges and universities from [state of service], who were enrolled in teacher education programs at the undergraduate level. The 180 student volunteers ranged from freshman to seniors for the weekend community service event.
Procedures

Data were gathered from the following sources: transcribed participant interviews, field notes, and documents such as flyers, emails, videos and handouts. The multiple data sources provided opportunities for triangulation “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Stake, 2000, p. 443). Interviews were semi-structured with prepared questions and probes. The goal of the interview was to gather rich descriptions. The following questions were prepared along with probes for richer responses:

1. How did you become involved in “[the service project]”?
2. What drew you to this type of experience?
3. How do you feel this experience will impact what you do in the classroom?
4. What do you hope to learn from this experience?
5. How is this different than field experiences connected to current course work?

The primary researcher was a full participant as she participated in the event, served on the executive board of the [student group], which reviews applications to determine which school districts will be served. The researcher understood the role of “[the service project]” as it was her second time participating in the event. While engaged in the weekend event she kept field notes and conducted interviews. The researcher kept a participant journal, as a means to document field notes, initial impressions after the interviews, as well as her reflections on the experience as it applied to her role as a pre-service teacher. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) describe this data collection method as a resource that captures personal insights and reflections while in the field.

Data analysis, a systematic process to make sense out of what has been collected (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1998), was conducted by reading through field notes, interview transcripts and documents. Field notes were gathered by the researcher in the field and analyzed by developing a set of codes along with documents and transcriptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The multiple data sources allowed the researchers to triangulate the data as well as categorize the data according to groupings that were alike or similar. After categories were identified, the data was manually coded to visually denote the patterns and the contradictions. The researchers created a table that documented the topics that emerged from the interviews for each researcher. This gave each researcher an idea of how they made sense of the data. Then using the field notes as an inductive method of constructing categories (Merriam, 2002), the researchers identified the following themes from the data: (1) the incongruity of pre-service teachers’ understanding of external and internal issues related to student learning, (2) the disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers, and (3) the realization of need.

The interpretive nature of qualitative research often comes with limitations. The interview sample was small (n = 20) compared to total participants (180) in “[the service project]” There was only one researcher conducting interviews, but her time was limited because she was also an “[the service project]” volunteer. As a result, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all contexts. Merriam (2002) pointed out, generalizations as traditionally defined are not the goal of qualitative research but to allow readers to “determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (p. 211).

Findings

From the analysis of the data, three themes were extracted concerning how pre-service teachers viewed community service in relation to disposition development. The themes are interrelated and expressed in conjunction with each other. Data is used to support these themes: (1) the incongruity of pre-service teachers’ understanding of external and internal issues related to student learning, (2) the disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers and (3) the realization of need.

Understanding of External and Internal Issues as Related to Student Learning

The process of learning is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, as seen by participants. The focus of pre-service teacher education tends to be predominately concerned with student learning, development, and motivation. All of which teachers have influence over and can monitor in their classrooms. These internal factors are often included under the heading of “psychology for teaching”, encompassing such topics as motivational theories, Bloom’s taxonomy, and Gardner’s multiple intelligences, to name a few as identified by the researcher in her teacher education program (Researcher Fieldnotes, 2010). External factors are aspects that inform student
learning that teachers have minimal or no control over. These may include building upkeep, condition of playground equipment, educational resources or places to store supplies. These types of issues may be out of the hands of even school administrators.

When these factors are contextualized, pre-service teachers can become proactive having developed an awareness and responsibility to mitigate the effects these factors have on student achievement. Several participants noticed the role of the environment and atmosphere of a classroom and school. They named “brightness of lights, bright colored walls, murals, painted playground equipment, and updated landscaping” as necessary for student learning. Participants saw their role as “helping to create a better environment for the students,” “it is the behind the scenes work,” as they painted slides, murals on walls and assembled shelving units. This is an external factor teachers have no control over but participants saw themselves as inducing change, “changing the environment” and “the exterior or the looks of the school to make them [children] more excited and willing to learn.”

By working with other teachers, community members and peers, participants reflected on their experiences as pre-service teachers. In these reflections they were making connections between their learning and their experience in their programs and when they were students. The way participants discussed factors that impact learning demonstrates how they care about the profession they are entering. These comments may be seen as demonstrating a “professional attitude,” because of the observable actions by these pre-service teachers. This sense of caring and responsibility to the school and the educational community demonstrates dispositions posited by Armstine (1990).

The disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers:

In early childhood theories we talk about creating a quality learning environment. This [the service project] directly relates to creating a quality learning environment because coming into a school where the paint is chipping doesn’t help students learn.

This participant vignette highlights the difference between what is presented in course work or field experiences at a purely theoretical level and what is internalized as a result of community service. Although pre-service teachers are trained to see themselves as pre-professionals, the course content most students are exposed to focuses on the “what” and the “how” of teaching; the academic nature of the profession. Pre-service teachers are taught how to create lesson plans, unit plans, create assessments, and engage in data driven instructional practices. However, teachers are more than deliverers of knowledge. Teachers are responsible to create inclusive classroom cultures and productive learning environments that are part of a greater learning community. Through this experience participants were able to get a glimpse of teachers who were committed to the community and school by giving of their time during the [service project] weekend.

In relation to dispositions such as equity, participants elaborated on the awareness “that there are people who are in more need than us [participants],” and “how tough some schools have it and how some communities don’t have everything.” Participants worked with teachers, parents, and community members who displayed compassion that allowed them to develop a sense of empathy. Participants connected to the “resources” the school had or did not have. Five participants discussed the lack of resources the school sites had. They compared this to what they remembered having growing up. As a means of showing empathy, participants stated, “We should be less-self centered” while another mentioned being “more appreciative and aware of what I had growing up.” Participants were able to see how their schooling experiences may not be the same as others.

Becoming empathetic to diverse teaching situations suggests that participants are on the path towards having the attitudes, beliefs, and values that inform how dispositions are actualized. Pre-service teachers were not concerned about the “what” and “how” of teaching but more concerned about what it takes to have a bright welcoming place for students. The commitment to the project demonstrated ways they were more empathetic to the different educational environments that exist.

The Realization of Need

We [pre-service teachers] talk about budget cuts and referendums. The reason why we are here is because of those things. So, we get the business aspect of teaching and then we get the behind the scenes stuff about being a teacher.
The aforementioned quote captures how participants expressed the realization of need in two different ways; school as a community fixture and the implications of policies on resources and conditions in schools. The essential component of community involvement and support was the community finding value in the school as part of the community, this was one of the components taken into account during the selection process to determine the school to host [receive the make-over] (Researcher Fieldnotes, 2010). The application video for each of the schools, highlights how old the schools are and that “generations” of families have attended these schools, which speaks to the ways the school has been part of the community for an extended period of time.

As participants discussed school as a community fixture the following sentiments were shared, “[it is] nice to see how you impact not only the school, teachers, and administrators, but also the community in which the school resides.” It was not only school community that valued the work being done, but also the community at large. One example of this community gratitude was manifested in the form of handmade thank you cards written and placed within the lunch boxes each participant was given. A different participant stated, “not everyone has that [a brand new elementary school] and [that] the community really does appreciate it [the service project]. [This was evident] from the notes we got [everyday] in [our] lunchboxes to the signs around the community [and school].” The type of service that the pre-service teachers engaged in did not include teaching or developing their skills to execute a lesson more effectively. Instead, they were able to capture a glimpse into the realities of budget cuts as it relates to schools.

Participant responses show ways in which a school is more than a physical building but more an essential part of the community at large. Half of the participants (n = 10) named different pro-social behaviors in their comments as it related to understanding the needs of the school and the community. Some participants named “teamwork.” This was discussed in relation to work with others from across the state and individuals from the community. Three participants named “communication.” Communication was described as “hearing the stories” from parents, teachers, and others in the community. They heard stories about budget cuts and referendums and the impact these have had on the school. Finally, another participant named “compromise” as another pro-social behavior. This was contextualized in relation to the specific tasks the pre-service teachers were doing. They had to determine which tasks needed more people or took more time and prioritize what needed to be done. The implicit disposition that participants gain is a sense of community. Being community minded is inclusive of many dispositions such as having empathy, respect, collaboration, and caring. The pro-social behaviors Swick (2001) highlights are informed by this mindset or disposition.

Implications

The results of this study hold important implications for teacher education certification programs at the undergraduate level. The study provides an example explaining how pre-service teachers develop the attitudes, beliefs and values that inform the dispositions that many teacher education programs require. In this study participants gained a greater sense of community awareness than they could experience within a class or in a field experience. While programs seek to help students see how theory and practice intersect, it is quite difficult to do this in four years, given the expectations of accreditation agencies.

It is important for teacher education programs to seek out ways to support pre-service teachers on a curricular and co-curricular level. As community service becomes more integrated into higher education learning environments as a means to initiate civic engagement, it is important to understand its value to pre-service teachers. Serow (1991) states, service provides a renewed sense of “social awareness among young people.” For this study, the sense of community, empathy and caring were outcomes for teacher education candidates.

These results suggest that community service is a way for students to develop desired teaching dispositions, particularly those most difficult to measure because they are not often observable in a college classroom or a field experience. It is important to note community service may serve as an additional way to facilitate dispositional growth in pre-service teachers.

Conclusion

As teacher educators seek to provide authentic classroom learning experiences for teacher candidates, the need to develop the necessary attitudes and behaviors to be effective classroom teachers should receive careful consideration. This project sought to explore how community service influences the dispositional development of pre-service teachers. The researchers intended
to understand how community service within an educational setting intersects with theory and learning.

One’s ability and willingness to learn is not only an incredibly complex and dynamic process; it is one that is in a cycle of contentious change and evolution. It is within this cycle that teachers are challenged to find ways to motivate and understand how students learn in order to truly become effective. As academic service learning secures a place in teacher education programs, continued research into pre-service teachers’ dispositions will be necessary. Academic courses provide a variety of learning experiences, however; non-academic opportunities such as community service have positive and sometimes unintended consequences such as fostering dispositional development and awakening students’ perceptions to the realities of working in K-12 schools. The following vignette sums up the work and its results.

“Sometimes as a teacher you loose that perspective about all the other background stuff. So I think that [this experience] gives pre-service teachers a well-rounded view and they see what needs to be done beyond the curriculum. Like renovations on the school, new painting to keep the school atmosphere and environment in which kids want to learn in.”

Pre-service teachers who engage in community service, even when it is unconnected to classroom activities, will have a greater sense of student needs, internal and external issues related to learning, as well as a way to contextualize non-classroom related issues. They are challenged to reexamine what drew them to this profession and identify ways that will keep them committed to serving students.

References


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Visions of Collaboration: The GirlPower Photovoice Project

Christina R. Miller, Zermarie Deacon, and Katie Fitzgerald

Abstract
In this manuscript we explore the use of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to build campus-community collaborations. While these collaborations may result in mutual benefit, the process may easily be derailed as a result of complications. We examine the strengths and weaknesses of the collaboration that produced the GirlPower Photovoice Project, a project that engaged middle school girls in an exploration of the factors that both improve and impede the health of their communities. Consistent with the Photovoice method, participants used photography to document their realities and then explored the resulting images in a group setting. We share the lessons learned from this collaboration from the perspective of both the academic and the community partners. In their own voices, both partners explore those factors that made the collaboration a success and those that hindered it. These include ensuring adequate time for relationship and trust development between the partners, advocating for a more fluid and organic process from the university institutional review board, and ensuring buy-in from all community agency staff—not just the executive director. In the end, we distill suggestions for others who wish to undertake a similarly risky yet significantly rewarding and important endeavor.

Campus-community collaborations are increasingly at the cutting edge of innovative and significant research. Universities across the nation are developing strategies and implementing programs to increase their connection with the location community. We will explore the benefits and challenges of campus-community collaboration and present a framework for creating successful and sustainable campus-community collaboration.

Campus-Community Collaboration
Campus-community collaboration is an interactive relationship between community groups or agencies and educational institutions where the academic partners and the community work together to confront common societal issues. Campus-community collaborations provide many benefits to both entities and it may seem like common sense to implement such partnerships wherever possible, but cooperative ventures of this sort have only begun to be utilized on a large scale in recent years. Vermont Campus Compact (2010) summarizes the three greatest perceived benefits of collaborations as follows: communities gain resources and aid in problem-solving from universities; universities gain greater public legitimacy and raison d’être; and students receive real-life experience, which aids both professional and personal development. Universities may develop collaborations with the community through a variety of practices including but not limited to: service-learning, student volunteerism, allowing the community to use campus space (e.g., computer labs), and research.

Being involved in the surrounding community is gaining traction as a desirable quality for a university, as evidenced by its inclusion as a new area of organization in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classification system. This addition was accompanied, naturally, by the development of an in-depth system for measuring the effectiveness of partnership programs and the means taken by universities to achieve success. The Carnegie Foundation (2013) defines community engagement as: “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.” The Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (2006) provide a set of “Principles of Good Community-Campus Partnerships” for use by organizations desiring to effectively implement such relationships, and these guidelines capture many of the benefits as well as suggest the potential pitfalls of this work. The principles cover a variety of topics from organization around a common goal, mutual trust, balance of power, communication, and sharing the benefits of the accomplishments.

Kezar (2005) has established eight core values crucial to collaboration and divides these into three different phases of partnership development.
One value, however, is unique and can be seen influencing each step of the process: networks. Possessing the support of a network is such a vital element in partnerships that they cannot develop or grow without this quality. The first phase is entitled “Building Commitment” and this encompasses “values,” “external pressure,” and “learning.” This is the step in which the necessity of collaboration is acknowledged and communicated between the two parties, building the impetus for establishing a significant partnership. Next is the stage of “Commitment” in which the values of “sense of priority” and “mission” are at play in the development of buy-in from authorities of both groups and leaders are identified in the process. The third and final step is “Sustaining” and includes “integrating structures” and “rewards,” without both of which there is no incentive to continue and deepen the relationship (Kezar, 2005, p. 845).

Though the value of pursuing and developing campus-community collaborations has been established, there are many barriers preventing their effective implementation and it has been estimated that over half of all cooperative efforts within universities themselves and with external groups fail (Doz, 1996). These kinds of collaborations are thus relatively high risk. Many of these difficulties lie in the structure of university departments and administration as well as lack of community organization or support (Kezar, 2005).

Using CBPR to Create Campus-Community Partnerships

How do we address the barriers and difficulties that are inherent in collaborative work? One strategy that may be useful to both the university and community partner is to engage in a Community-Based Participatory Action Research Project (CBPR). CBPR is emerging as an exciting alternative to traditional research methods and is a methodology that involves participants as active partners in research rather than mere passive subjects. CBPR’s are defined as “an orientation to research that focuses on relationships between academic and community partners, with principles of colearning, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment and incorporates community theories, participation, and practices into the research efforts” (Wallerstein and Duran, 2006, p.1). Minkler, Blackwell, Thompson & Tamir (2003) state that

[CBPR] equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change …” p. 4).

CBPR creates greater community commitment to achieving real change as well as increased validity in the eyes of lawmakers and those with the power to affect the reforms being sought. CBPR methods have significantly gained in popularity in the last ten years as various prestigious organizations have lauded their efficacy in reaching underserved populations. The National Institute of Health has developed a Scientific Interest Group to promote communication among federal agencies interested in CBPR and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has increased funding for CBPR (Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, 2013).

Campus-community partnerships and CBPR projects reflect the unique contextual factors of the local community and therefore are all different. They hold some similar values of shared power and collaboration, but the application and implementation of this work varies widely between groups. For instance, the University of Illinois revamped how they did research with the East St. Louis community in 1990 when Dr. Ken Reardon began administering the program. They evolved from treating the community as a research lab, to working with the community members to solve the problems they wanted to address. The community led the work of developing small-scale short-term community improvement projects that were immensely successful (Rothman, Schaffer, & Anderson, 1998). Another example of a CBPR inspired campus-community partnership is the work of Macalester University in St. Paul, MN. They have re-envisioned the experience they want to give students and their role in the local community. Students participate in CBPR through their coursework or the Honors College. An Urban Geography class at Macalester has created a book highlighting the economic potential of the main business district of the East Side neighborhood in St. Paul, MN. The book is being used by the mayor to secure funding for the area from the state legislature (Interdisciplinary Action Research Program, 2013).

Photovoice

One exciting CBPR methodology that has been successfully initiated with a variety
of populations is Photovoice. Photovoice is a participatory method that allows participants to use photography to document various aspects of their lived experience (Wang, 1999). This method is particularly effective at capturing the perspectives of groups traditionally underrepresented in research. Photovoice additionally has a potentially powerful impact upon participants, developing their overall sense of empowerment as well as their readiness and capacity to engage in social change (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005).

The GirlPower Photovoice Project

The GirlPower Photovoice Project was the result of collaboration between a child abuse and neglect treatment and prevention agency and university faculty to explore the perceptions of adolescent girls regarding the health promoting and inhibiting aspects of their community. The project emerged from the vision of the agency director, though the specific project was developed collaboratively between the agency staff and academic partners. The research team included the agency director (Fitzgerald) and various staff members from the agency, assistant professor in social work (Miller), associate professor in human relations (Deacon), and two social work students. The agency staff participated in the project as an addition to their current job duties. Twelve middle school girls ranging in age from 12–14 were recruited to participate in the GirlPower Photovoice project. Participants were drawn from an after-school program sponsored by the agency. Three of the participants were African American, two were Hispanic, and 7 were Caucasian.

Study Design

Study recruitment began in April of 2011. Families were invited to attend an information meeting at their daughters’ school to learn more about the project and ask questions regarding the project and the Institutional Review Board paperwork. The girls then participated in two Photovoice training sessions before beginning data collection and focus groups.

The focus groups involved two research team facilitators and a member of the agency staff along with all 12 participants. The Photovoice sessions followed the same format with the girls downloading their photos while eating snacks, selecting their favorite photos for group discussion, and then participating in an audio recorded focus group about their photos. The first half of the meetings took place after school in the school cafeteria and the last half occurred at the agency because school had ended for the summer. The photo assignments given each week were: Describe your community: What is the healthiest and unhealthiest place in your community; what helps you be healthy; what keeps you from being healthy; take a picture of the contents of your fridge; take a picture of your favorite snack; take a picture of what you had for dinner.

The discussion of the partners’ perspectives will be presented as unique and distinct because of the value they individually contribute to the overall theme of this paper. In an effort to capture the distinct voice of each partner, we posed a series of questions to the agency director and staff who participated in the Photovoice project as well as our own personal reflections. The analysis of responses revealed six key themes addressing the question of how and to what extent the use of this CBPR advanced a strong or sustainable campus/community partnership. The six key themes are: Shared Process with Different Motivations, Impact on the Girls, Community Support and Recognition, Inflexibility of the System, Differing Approaches to Work with Youth, and Recommendations. Each of the themes was identified by at least two of the stakeholders groups. We present the information by theme and then provide the perspective of the various stakeholders in their own words.

Analysis of Key Terms

Shared process with different motivations. The theme of different motivations/same process refers to varying impetus of the stakeholder groups to participate in a collaborative project and how these different motivations can impact the relationships between group members even though they are all participating in the same process. This was the “building commitment” phase in which the stakeholders negotiated values, dealt with external pressure, and learned from one another.

Voice of the university. We had different primary goals than the agency for our work with the girls on the Photovoice project. Everyone working on the project wanted to create a worthwhile experience for the girls who participated, however as tenure track faculty, we were both primarily focused on learning something valuable about the health of adolescent girls and developing publishable materials from those findings. The agency was interested in learning something valuable for improving their programming and creating a special experience for the girls they serve. Though our primary goals were different, the process we used to reach those goals
was the same. We worked in concert with each other to implement a mutually beneficial Photovoice project that met the goals of both parties. However, we also want to point out that this difference in motivation or primary goal was also the root of some tensions between the two parties, particularly the agency staff and us. We thus approached our partnership with a different set of values.

We held our collaboration meetings during the lunch hour in an effort to be respectful of the agency staff time and create a relaxed atmosphere around the sharing of food. Early in those meetings, it became clear that there was perhaps not complete buy-in from the agency staff as they were not always open to discussion and at times very resistant to aspects of working with a university partner. At times tension developed into disagreements between the agency staff and academic partners related to the execution of various aspects of the project. In an attempt to bridge these differences, we took the agency staff to lunch and expressly did not discuss the project, but instead spent time getting acquainted with each other. It is, however, not clear that this overcame tensions. Our attempt to build relationship outside of the project, was probably too little too late. We were in the middle of project planning, experiencing the result of not spending an adequate time on engagement and relationship building. We believe the underlying tension was related to differing motivations for pursuing the project and those differing motivations were rooted in our varying job requirements and external pressures from those jobs. Our main interest was in research and publication because we were tenure track faculty in a research-intensive university. Our jobs require that we obtain external funding and publish articles. Our colleagues and tenure and promotion committees are less interested in the contribution we make to the local community. Promotion committees are less interested in the appropriate roles, working through training and human subject review considerations, etc. From an administrator’s viewpoint, I was pleased and don’t remember feeling like we were doing any more than our fair share. I think the staff struggled with their involvement in some of these discussions. I think they just wanted to be providing services for the kids and, again, struggled to embrace the research aspect of the project. I think if we did something like this again — we would need to help staff better see how this data helps their kids, community or CCFI. There were a few comments like “well, we are doing all this so some papers can be published,” — not sure they ever really “got it” but also think that was as much CCFI’s administrators responsibility to help them get it as it was the entire research team. In the future — I think we would have to pick more applied research to make it more relevant to direct service staff involved.

I felt that they (project planning meetings) went really well. I think we did what we needed to do in terms of discussing key issues, determining appropriate roles, working through training and human subject review considerations, etc. From an administrator’s viewpoint, I was pleased and don’t remember feeling like we were doing any more than our fair share. I think the staff struggled with their involvement in some of these discussions. I think they just wanted to be providing services for the kids and, again, struggled to embrace the research aspect of the project. I think if we did something like this again — we would need to help staff better see how this data helps their kids, community or CCFI. There were a few comments like “well, we are doing all this so some papers can be published,” — not sure they ever really “got it” but also think that was as much CCFI’s administrators responsibility to help them get it as it was the entire research team. In the future — I think we would have to pick more applied research to make it more relevant to direct service staff involved.

**Inflexibility of university system.** The theme of inflexibility of the university system describes the challenges each stakeholder faced trying to implement a collaborative project through the often stifling bureaucracy of Institutional Review Boards and Office’s of Sponsored Programs. This theme is strongly connected to the different motivations/same process theme because of its linkage to the external pressures faced by each of the stakeholders.

**Voice of the university.** For example, frustration...
resulted from a disconnect between the academic process and procedures and the needs of the agency. The university partners needed to consider IRB protocols and university requirements. These did not allow for the flexibility valued by the agency staff. This played out in agency staff regularly deciding to change data collection procedures without regard for the time involved in making modifications to the IRB protocol.

**Voice of the agency director.** At times the ways in which the agency operates services was in conflict with research requirements. A perfect example of this was invitations to participate in the Photovoice project. Research requirements associated with the University Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Committee review requires that the flyer or information be provided in a very professional and non-enticing manner (white paper, no graphics, etc.). In practice, when working with youth we know that we have to make events and projects enticing for them to get their initial interest. So – we had to alter our flyer and how we approach the girls in a way that was not what they were “used to” and this probably raised more concern among them than less. Just an interesting example of how these systems differ (community provider and research institution) in unanticipated ways.

I think that the research institution has to have policies in place that recognize that research is being done in a community context with partners that have evidence-based and well thought out ways in which services are provided and clients are engaged. I think the institution we worked with (in this case the university’s IRB) was set up for basic research with human subjects and was not designed to accommodate this much more creative and reciprocal type of research collaborative.

**Impact on the girls.** The theme of impact on the girls refers to the perceptions of all the stakeholders regarding the impact of participating in the GirlPower Photovoice Project had on each of the girls.

**Voice of the university.** First, the girls who participated in the project not only enjoyed the experience, but also learned about themselves while developing photographic and other skills. The girls thus derived programmatic benefit from participating. We were able to contribute to the positive development of a group of young adolescent girls within the local community.

**Voice of the agency director.** The most successful part of the GP project was the obvious and documented impact it had on the girls that were involved. They expressed in writing and in their public speaking the importance and value that this experience had on them in terms of giving them a voice to talk about what matters to them, developing an understanding that others care about them, learning new skills (e.g., photography) that they may aspire to pursue further, etc. There are many elements that demonstrated a positive impact on the girls involved. We also noted that in terms of family involvement (which is a goal of our services) there were few parents involved on the front end of the project (few attended the parent orientation) but many more attended the community event where their daughter’s work was featured and celebrated and where the girls were honored by the mayor of the city, etc. We saw a sense of pride and accomplishment in the girls and their families.

**Voice of the agency staff.** GirlPower Photovoice Project was extremely successful in bringing the life of “art” into middle school girls’ hands by providing them with unrestricted use of a nice, brand new digital camera. I believe the opportunity for them to explore a creative expression of themselves and their lives will have lasting impacts. Having not worked directly with the girls, I can only answer this question in part. This project gave the girls a new experience that they otherwise would never have. I’m not sure that attendance incentives worked for the girls, however the community was behind the project in supporting with donations. I think the exhibit at the school was well done. Having the mayor recognize the girls will be something they never forget.

**Community support & recognition.** The theme of community support and recognition highlights how the GirlPower Photovoice project brought about community support for the project, the agency, and the university and also provided recognition to the girls who participated in the project.

**Voice of the university.** Similarly, the agency derived benefit from the collaboration. Data collection ended in an exhibit held at the university. Multiple prominent members of the community were invited to attend, and the agency obtained significant publicity with coverage of the exhibit appearing on the front page of the local paper twice. Similarly, the girls’ photos were displayed at other community art events. However, perhaps most significantly, the agency was able to utilize the photographs and the girls’ experiences as part of their major annual fundraising event. Finally, KF approached CM to help organize a candlelight vigil on the university campus in remembrance of
the child abuse cases at Penn State and to make a statement that our community and university will stand up against child abuse. Following the vigil a panel discussion on child abuse was held at the social work building. Members of the panel included university lawyers, directors of child abuse treatment centers, and the police. Shortly after that event and certainly in response to negative publicity of the Penn State child abuse scandal, the university provost issued a policy regarding protection of minors on the university campus. The progression of these events illustrates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the agency and university and the mutual benefit and visibility they receive as a result of the collaboration.

**Voice of the agency director.** We also felt that the GP project helped to add an interesting and new component to our services. It allowed our agency to further engage the community – which is an ongoing goal of our agency; we want to impress upon the community the critical importance of youth voice and engagement. We were challenged by the process of publicizing the Photovoice Exhibit and we attribute that to the lack of institutional support to raise this as an example of something important or of value to the university. Had the university marketing machine gotten behind this, it would have tremendously impacted the notoriety and importance of this work both locally and perhaps regionally. This is another example of professors being “out there” on their own trying to advance a concept of university-based engaged research without the institution itself behind them in any way. If there was a place within the university’s agenda or structure to highlight and support community-based engaged research, there would have been much greater attention paid to this and greater opportunity for potential replication.

**Voice of the agency staff.** I think having the Photovoice exhibit in conjunction with the school of social work opening was a coup! It brought publicity to the exhibit. I think we had high expectations for this project to rotate throughout the community. A lack of response during the town’s Friday Art Walk fizzled future viewings. Great efforts were made to publicize the project and exhibit through the local town paper and the large city paper.

**Differing approach to working with youth.** The theme of differing approaches illustrates how the agency and the university had different philosophies or practices about working with youth. The agency had a deeply rooted and strong mentorship model that permeated their work with youth. This approach was incompatible with the approach of the university partners who were engaging with the youth in a very time-limited project. We approached the work much like a school teacher would approach her class or a therapeutic group facilitator would approach working with a group. We established rules and boundaries, separated disruptive participants, and sought to create an environment that fostered productivity.

**Voice of the university.** Another source of complication developed between the agency’s model for their after-school program and the model for implementing a Photovoice project. The agency’s after school program is a very open system that participants are free to join whenever they please. In addition to the openness of the after-school program, it is also based on a mentorship model. Several adults participate in the after-school groups and develop meaningful relationships with the students over a long period time. Discipline issues are not a major problem because of the positive and healthy relationships that have developed between the students and staff. These key differences led to two areas of tension. The first challenge to overcome was related to the openness of the agency’s after-school program. The Photovoice project was designed with the intent that participants attend each session and complete their photography assignments in-between sessions. We had to use multiple methods (phone calls, texts, and notes) to ensure the participants attended each session and this was not the normal practice of the agency when inviting students to agency-sponsored activities. The second challenge came from disconnect between the agency’s mentorship model and our time-limited project-based interaction with the girls. We needed the girls to treat this experience more like school and pay attention, talk one at a time, and complete their photo assignments. We quickly realized that to create this environment we would need to split the girls into two small groups and the agency wanted to keep close friends together in the same group. When we shared our concern that the close friends would not pay attention when together, the agency’s response was that “these aren’t college students” implying that we did not know how to interact with youth. The agency did not recognize that because of our limited time to work with the girls and lack of mentor/mentee relationship, we needed to use different tactics (ie setting rules and norms, separating disruptive students, and requiring regular attendance and participation) to have a meaningful Photovoice project.
Voice of the agency staff. One particular challenge was the “free flowing” aspect of the mentor group that meets monthly to have set meeting times and place during the school week was challenging but attendance is normally voluntary so for them to have required attendance to certain meetings or outings was challenging because they do have other conflicting activities going on or it may not work with the family schedule. Also having outside or new faces involved each week that are not normally part of our mentor group was tough for the girls to build relationships and follow direction from community outsiders when the interactions were brief and only for a short term.

Discussion and Recommendations

The GirlPower Photovoice project was ultimately a success, however, we did encounter a number of obstacles along the way. While the project did benefit the university researchers, the agency, and the young participants, the process was not tension and trouble free. This is not unique to collaborative processes. We were able to distill multiple lessons from our collaborative work. These lessons can inform future collaborative work.

The first lessons learned regarding campus-community collaborations is the importance of time. Allowing time to interact and build relationship between stakeholders is essential before the work of project development and implementation can be undertaken. This time allows for the true relationships to develop naturally and lays the foundation for mutual understanding. Unfortunately, the reality is that time is a luxury that most of us cannot always afford in these kinds of situations. However, when at all possible, it should be prioritized. Given how hard it is to find the time upfront, a promising strategy to mitigate an absence of time. Allowing time to interact and build relationships and follow direction from community outsiders when the interactions were brief and only for a short term.

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The first lessons learned regarding campus-community collaborations is the importance of time. Allowing time to interact and build relationship between stakeholders is essential before the work of project development and implementation can be undertaken. This time allows for the true relationships to develop naturally and lays the foundation for mutual understanding. Unfortunately, the reality is that time is a luxury that most of us cannot always afford in these kinds of situations. However, when at all possible, it should be prioritized. Given how hard it is to find the time upfront, a promising strategy to mitigate an absence of time. Allowing time to interact and build relationships and follow direction from community outsiders when the interactions were brief and only for a short term.

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can be melded (the researchers’ needs and that of the community). Youth present a sensitive problem. However, it may be better, in general, to collaborate with the grassroots members of the community in order to understand their process and to fit the research process around this. The burden usually lies with the researcher in these kinds of situations — by virtue of our position and the benefit we derive. However, these challenges are not insurmountable, and with proper planning and implementation campus-community collaborations can be rendered more enduring and successful.

References


About the Authors

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Participants in the middle school GirlPower Photovoice Project.
Service Learning and LEAP: Increasing Respect for Diversity through Campus-Community Collaboration in Advanced Spanish Courses

Jodie Parys

Abstract

This paper provides a case study that looks at the learning outcomes associated with the addition of a service-learning component to an advanced Spanish grammar course at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, a University of Wisconsin System comprehensive campus. This article will first illustrate the ways in which service learning serves various educational objectives valued at both the departmental and university level. It will then demonstrate how service learning, as a recognized high-impact practice helps students achieve several specified outcomes of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative related to diversity and global perspectives. Finally, through a qualitative analysis of feedback and reflection activities from 70 service-learning participants regarding their campus-community collaborations in a recent semester, this study will highlight how service learning is an ideal pedagogical method for teaching language students about diversity, focusing specifically on learning outcomes in the realms of linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity.

Introduction

An Overview of the LEAP Initiative

In response to the shifting demands of an increasingly globalized world, there has been a systematic push to reform higher education in an effort to “respond to the changing demands of the twenty-first century. … Today, and in the years to come, college graduates need higher levels of learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to navigate this more demanding environment successfully and responsibly” http://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm. These goals are embodied by the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), a “national advocacy, campus action, and research initiative that champions the importance of a twenty-first century liberal education— for individuals and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality” (https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/Introduction_to_LEAP.pdf, p. 1).

Launched in 2005 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), LEAP focuses on systemic change to higher education and is organized around a set of four broad Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) that emphasize the importance of a liberal education for all students and reject a divided approach to higher education whereby some students receive a liberal education, while others received narrowly focused training in one or more fields. The program was originally launched in three states—California, Oregon, and Wisconsin— in an effort to review general education programs in higher education, and expand and implement practices that led to greater student success, particularly for underrepresented populations. My campus is located in one of these pioneer states and has been involved in the LEAP initiative since its inception. LEAP has since been expanded to include Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Utah, and Virginia, with adoption by additional states expected. Collaborative teams comprised of constituents from public and private institutions work with AAC&U to identify and implement pedagogical changes across the curriculum that lead to greater student success.

Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) and High-Impact Practices

LEAP “engages the public with core questions about what really matters in college; connects employers and educational leaders as they make the case for the importance of liberal education in the global economy and in our diverse democracy; and helps all students achieve the essential learning outcomes. ”The ELOs are broadly defined and are meant to be incorporated throughout the curriculum. In LEAP there are four primary ELOs:

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world
- Intellectual and practical skills
• Personal and social responsibility
• Integrative and applied learning (www.aacu.org/leap/)

Further, through an in-depth study of a variety of educational practices that have been shown to significantly impact student success, Kuh (2008) has identified a series of high-impact practices that can be employed by colleges and universities as they integrate the LEAP initiative into their curricula. While many of these practices in and of themselves are not new, the novelty of LEAP is found in “the collective effort to document the impact of these practices and the effort to see them as part of a larger ‘sea change’ in undergraduate education” (McNair & Albertine, 2012). HIPs include the following:

• Seminars and experiences
• Common intellectual experiences
• Learning communities
• Writing-intensive courses
• Collaborative assignments and projects
• Undergraduate research
• Diversity/global learning
• Service learning or community-based learning
• Internships
• Capstone courses and projects (http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm)

As we can see, one of the primary high-impact practices of LEAP is service learning, which has a long history as a pedagogical tool that provides instructors and students with a way to cross the boundary between the campus and surrounding community. In doing so, students are given an invaluable opportunity to reinforce knowledge gained in the classroom by serving the community and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. This affords them with a beneficial learning experience while meeting several of the essential learning outcomes expressly defined in the LEAP initiative, as well as meeting several additional departmental and institutional goals.

Project Overview and Objectives

My campus is part of the first state system to partner with AAC&U as a LEAP state and as such, has served as a model to other campuses as they participate in this initiative. Since its inception, collaboration and shared experience have been vital to the advancement of the LEAP initiative on campuses across the nation. In fact, according to Albertine (2011), “the initiative provides opportunities for faculty to join other campus, system, and community leaders in shared work—top down and bottom up, together, with a view from the inside of systems and campuses, and from the outside in” (p. 5).

Working from this point of departure, this paper provides a case study that looks at the use of service-learning projects in my own advanced Spanish grammar and composition courses and evaluates student reflections on those campus-community experiences. Specifically:

1. I will identify several ways in which service learning meets various educational objectives valued by my institution, showing how it is an ideal way to teach diversity perspectives in the college classroom while achieving several specified outcomes of the LEAP initiative that are related to diversity and global perspectives.

2. Using student feedback, I will illustrate student reflections and learning related to three specific areas of diversity: linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, and racial diversity.

The Importance of Teaching Diversity Perspectives

LEAP places an emphasis on the examination of human cultures, as well as understanding and appreciating the diversity of the human experience. This is illustrated through the ELOs that stress intercultural knowledge and competence (http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm). The notion of active involvement with diverse communities, in my estimation, is best achieved through the use of service learning, one of the identified high-impact practices recommended by LEAP. As a practitioner of service learning throughout my 15-year career in higher education, I have found it to be invaluable for not only exposing students to diverse cultures, but much more importantly, providing them with the vehicle to create meaningful interactions with the peoples of those cultures. It also allows them to engage in thoughtful reflection on both the shared experiences and differences between themselves and those from other backgrounds.

The ability to relate to and respect others also lies at the heart of the mission statements of various colleges and universities across this nation. An example of this is seen in my own institution, as well as peer institutions across our state. At the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, respect
for diversity is highlighted in the University’s Value and Mission statements. One of five values articulated by the university is a “commitment to develop a sense of community, respect for diversity, and global perspectives,” while our mission clearly states that we are:

…(c)ommitted to the development of the individual, the growth of personal and professional integrity and respect for diversity and global perspectives. These are met by providing academic and co-curricular programs that emphasize the pursuit of knowledge and understanding and a commitment to service within a safe and secure environment (http://www.uww.edu/registrar/catalogs/12-14/mission.html).

Likewise, the University of Wisconsin System schools have a shared core mission statement that expounds on nine missions common to all participating four-year institutions. The eighth item listed articulates that each university shall “serve the needs of women, minority, disadvantaged, disabled and non-traditional students and seek racial and ethnic diversification of the student body and the professional faculty and staff” (www.uww.edu/registrar/catalogs/12-14/mission.html). Clearly, fostering a respect for diverse perspectives and creating an inclusive environment that is respectful and understanding of difference is essential to the University of Wisconsin System mission and those of many other universities across the United States. How that mission is carried out, however, varies greatly across schools, colleges, departments, and programs. It is my position that one of the most effective ways to achieve these goals is through the incorporation of service-learning projects that engage students with the local and regional communities and provide the opportunity to meaningfully interact with diverse populations.

Service Learning in Advanced Spanish: Integrating Diversity through Immersion Experiences

Background

According to Wehling (2006), “Apart from studying abroad, service learning is one of the best approaches to combine praxis and knowledge in second language acquisition and cross-cultural competence” (p. 300). Further, “‘doing’ is a kind of engagement and has been shown to be positively associated with student achievement” (Miller, 2009, p. 6). At the heart of service learning is this very notion of “doing”, or putting into action the lessons presented in the classroom in a way that allows students to personally experience the material in a way that is often not possible within the confines of the classroom. Kuh further affirms the likelihood that students participating in service learning and other types of experiential learning will “experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves,” adding that “these experiences often challenge students to develop new ways of thinking about and responding immediately to novel circumstances as they work side-by-side with peers on intellectual and practical tasks, inside and outside the classroom, on and off campus” (“Why Integration…”, p. 28).

Cognizant of all of the benefits of service learning and its importance as a methodology to teach diversity perspectives in foreign-language classrooms, I have worked over the course of my career to integrate service learning into my Spanish language courses, from beginning-level to advanced-. Because of the fluid nature of this pedagogical method, it has been a work in progress. However, each semester provided lessons to be integrated into future semesters, all with the goal of continually improving partnerships with community agencies, increasing learning and immersion opportunities, and incorporating meaningful reflection activities that maximize student learning. Because of the rigorous nature of this type of teaching pedagogy and the need to continually update, I have decided to focus my efforts more recently on complete integration of service learning into my Advanced Spanish grammar course (5th semester). The result is an iteration of a service-learning model that is well-integrated with the curriculum and has well-established partnerships throughout the community, thus affording students a wide-range of choices in terms of project selection. What follows is first an overview of the structure of service learning in my course, followed by a qualitative analysis of the reflective feedback from one sample of 70 participants in a recent semester, illustrating the impact service learning has had on them, specifically highlighting the strides made in the arena of diversity perspectives. I analyzed data collected through a reflective composition, a mid-term oral presentation, a roundtable discussion, and summative written student evaluations of their experiences. The results illustrate that students developed a new-found respect for and understanding of diversity through their participation in various service-learning projects, and in the process, met some of the ELOs specified by the LEAP Initiative.
Service-Learning Model

In a typical semester, there are 20-25 students in each section of my Advanced Spanish course. I generally teach 3 sections of this class each semester. The course encompasses a grammar review that has as its focus the refinement of typically difficult topics for second-language learners. We also work intensively on writing skills, incorporating ever-more-advanced syntax and lexicon through multiple writing assignments, with each undergoing rigorous review and revision. Apart from this grammatical and structural focus, we strive to develop conversational skills through daily discussions about relevant topics to Spanish-language study. Lastly, I integrate articles and short literary selections to begin to introduce students to both oral and written literary analysis. In a rigorous course such as this, it may seem at first glance that the addition of service learning would overwhelm the language learner with yet another requirement. However, I have found that service learning has the opposite effect on my students; it integrates all of the topics covered in class through practical application, and as a result, students often show increased interest and motivation in the classroom, striving to improve their cultural and linguistic knowledge so that they perform better in the community. This positive-feedback loop was an unexpected, but very positive, result that I witnessed in a majority of students and is affirmed through their feedback.

After experimenting with offering service learning as an optional assignment in my courses, I have ultimately decided to make it a mandatory element of my course for all students, largely because of the positive results I observed in previous semesters in students who chose the service-learning option versus those who participated in the alternative (attending cultural events of their choice related to the Latino community). I found that those who were actively involved in service as opposed to being passive observers at various cultural events (movies, art exhibits, plays, concerts, speeches, etc.) reflected more positively on the experiences, saw the connection to pedagogical goals more clearly, and exhibited a greater understanding of diversity at the end of the class. As a result, my students are now required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of service learning throughout the 16-week semester; most go on to complete 20-30 hours, on average, and many continue beyond the semester requirement.

In order to maximize the potential benefit of service learning, I believe it is important to allow students to have some control over the process of selecting a service site so that they can find the best fit for their own personal and professional goals. With this in mind, I have created several long-standing partnerships with a number of non-profit groups and programs in the community that welcome my students as service-learning participants and are cognizant of the pedagogical goals I have for them, making them active partners in the educational process of service learning. Among the established partnerships are several literacy agencies that provide ESL classes, emergent literacy training, citizenship exam review, and other services. The most well-established connection is with a County Literacy Council, and nearly a quarter of my students choose to fill a role in one of the aforementioned projects. Other agencies include a local ESL program, where students help provide bilingual activities for the children of the adult learners in the program; as well as another County Literacy Council, which offers ESL and citizenship classes in an adjacent county. Closer to campus, many students also choose to develop and teach a basic Spanish course to the children in the 4K program at the University Children’s Center and its satellite program, held at a local elementary school. In addition to these opportunities, a number of students complete projects at a local health clinic that provides free medical service once per week, serving a predominantly Spanish-speaking population. Despite the numerous opportunities listed above where I have already established a contact, several students each semester choose their own projects in agencies that interest them in other ways. These include schools, churches, a local food pantry, and social service agencies, among others.

Because of this multi-faceted approach, it is imperative to hold a one-on-one consultation session with each student at the beginning of the semester to aid in the selection of an agency and a project that fits each student’s educational goals, while still addressing the pedagogical goals for the course, which include the following: (1) practice language skills while interacting with Hispanic individuals at various community agencies; (2) gain insight into the diversity of Hispanic cultures, particularly those represented in the counties surrounding the University; (3) perform a valuable service to the community; (4) begin to explore answers to specific issues discussed in class, including questions about bilingual education, the use of Spanish and/or English in our country, the English-only debate, and immigration; and finally, (5) begin to conceptualize ways to forge
cooperative relationships with Spanish-speakers in the community. These goals are explicitly outlined for students at the inception of the project and are reinforced throughout the semester, particularly during various reflective assessments.

**Methodology**

For the purposes of this specific study, I analyzed students’ written and oral reflections about their service-learning experiences during a recent semester. There were 70 students participants in this study, which was also the total number of students in my three sections of Advanced Spanish in the semester of this study. Students in this course are a fairly representative cross-section of our campus population and the semester of this study was no exception. According to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (www.uww.edu/irp/factsandfigures/enrollemt), approximately 82% of our student body is comprised of state residents, with 17% from other U.S. states, and approximately 1% from other countries. In terms of ethnic and racial background, the majority (85%) of students self-identify as white (non-Hispanic), with the remaining students identifying as African-American (4.8%), Hispanic (3.8%), American Indian (0.2%), Southeast Asian American (0.9%), other Asian American (0.8%); the remainder identify as two or more ethnicities (http://www.uww.edu/ir/student/demographics). The majority of students also self-reported little to no experience with people from diverse backgrounds prior to entering my course.

Students began their service projects within the first three weeks of the semester and continued in the project for a minimum of one semester. The minimum commitment was 15 hours of service throughout the semester. On average, the students in this study volunteered 16 hours, with some spending as many as 25 hours throughout the semester at their selected site. Throughout the semester, students were presented with several opportunities to reflect upon their experiences and tie them to the specific course learning objectives. These were incorporated into the course as required course assignments. Students:

1. Completed a reflective essay (2 pages) during the first month of the semester (week 4).
2. Gave a 5-minute mid-term oral presentation at the mid-point of the semester (week 8).
3. Participated in a round-table discussion at the end of the semester (week 12).
4. Filled out a post-service written evaluation in which they were asked to succinctly describe the impact that service learning had on them as a person and as a student (week 16).

In each instance, students were explicitly asked to reflect upon their perception about and experiences with people from racially, linguistically, and culturally distinct backgrounds. I took care to integrate these reflective activities at different points in the semester to have a sense of the changes in thoughts and perceptions over the course of the semester. I viewed the samples holistically to observe any changes that occurred during the service-learning experience. Then, I performed a qualitative study of these four reflective pieces to analyze the impact that service learning had on my students’ perspectives about linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity, particularly when pertaining to Spanish language and cultures. When summarizing the results below, the general summaries draw upon my observations from this holistic, qualitative analysis of all of the samples taken as a whole, with the goal of describing overarching tendencies and trends in the areas of linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity. I then included quotes from students’ post-service written evaluations to illustrate specific examples of how these general results impacted individual students.

Much like the results reported by Tilley-Lubbs (2004), my students “experienced changes in perspectives resulting in blurring of Otherness” (p. 135). The dichotomy of “us-them” showed clear signs of erosion as students grappled with reconciling previously held beliefs (often stereotypical) in the face of cooperative experiences that allied them with individuals with whom they had previously had few interactions.

**Results**

**Linguistic Diversity**

The most significant area of impact was in the realm of linguistic ability. The following comment succinctly summarizes the sentiments of a majority of students:

The service-learning project has brought me more confidence with the Spanish language. While preparing the lessons and presenting them to the children, I realized that I know more Spanish than I thought. To be able to teach a different language brings you the confidence needed to
advance. We are of the select few that are able to understand a different language in America. It is good to learn another language in America, especially because of its mix of different cultures. The children we are teaching are already gaining a better understand of the society around them and how they can help to make it function at a better level.

Nearly every student who used Spanish in his/her service project reported overcoming a significant linguistic barrier by the end of the term. Most students at this level of study have had little or no opportunity to speak Spanish outside of the classroom prior to participating in service learning. They reported feeling nervous, anxious, and insecure in their communicative abilities at the outset of the project. However, after learning that, even in imperfect Spanish, they were comprehensible and were able to make a positive impact in the lives of real people in the community, they reported a significant increase in confidence in their speaking abilities and more significantly still, a desire to continue studying Spanish and interacting with the Spanish-speaking community to improve their abilities. Numerous students reported that after the completion of the semester, they made the decision to declare either a major or minor in Spanish, with the goal of becoming bilingual professionals in a number of fields.

Another positive result of participating in service learning was that students had the chance to meet and speak with people with a variety of accents and those who spoke different registers of Spanish, ranging from an informal, slang-filled Spanish often spoken by teenagers and young adults to a professional, formal Spanish used by several of the clients served and the majority of the volunteer coordinators in the service agencies. Consequently, students were forced to negotiate meaning and were challenged to activate all of their previous knowledge to make themselves understood. This required the use of circumlocution, an essential communicative skill that students need to develop as they strive for increased fluency. In the case of students serving as ESL tutors, they witnessed the language-learning process from the perspective of instructor and learned valuable lessons in patience, not only towards their “students”, but for their own language learning process. They now understand that becoming proficient in a language is a process that takes significant effort and time.

A number of students also commented on the considerable language barrier that they witnessed at their service sites and showed compassion for individuals who struggled to communicate in a language they didn’t understand, especially after having been in that position themselves. In many cases, students who had, at the beginning of the semester, decreed that all Spanish-speaking immigrants need to “learn our language” began to consider the complexity of the issue and contemplate ways to address the language barrier that often exists between Spanish and English monolinguals in this country. As a result, they proposed potential solutions to the issue, often inserting themselves into the process, thus shattering the “us-them” dichotomy and proposing a cooperative solution. They asserted that it is the responsibility of both Spanish-speaking immigrants and U.S. citizens to work together to solve the issues confronting both groups today. For instance, several students suggested that more English-speaking adults take Spanish classes in order to learn the language and cultures of Spanish-speakers so that they avoid making judgments based on stereotypes and ignorance. Another echoed this sentiment, lamenting the apathy in our nation regarding learning a second (or third, etc.) language, particularly when viewed in comparison to other nations where bi/multi-lingualism is the norm. Other students proposed that one way to overcome the aforementioned language barrier was for our government to offer widespread ESL classes to new immigrants and for U.S. citizens to take a more active role in these programs to aid in language instruction, much like they did through their service projects. Students cautioned, however, that even though they saw language classes (both ESL and second-language) as one method to overcome the aforementioned language barrier, they felt strongly that immigrants should not give up their cultural identity in the process because of the potential benefit all citizens can gain from coexisting in a diverse society.

Cultural Diversity

This cooperative language continued in students’ discussion of what they learned in relation to cultural diversity. They began to envision adaptation and acclimation as bidirectional processes, asserting that it is the responsibility of all citizens to take the steps necessary to adapt to our ever-changing society and the people in it. Students expressed amazement, admiration, and respect for the people they met and the cultural traditions that they shared. They also began to see commonalities...
and parallels between their own lives and cultural traditions and those of the people with whom they worked, especially after they took the time to learn about life in the U.S. through the perspective of the immigrants they met. One student, whose parents were against her studying Spanish and volunteering in a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood, reflected that after the experience, she found shared values and experiences with the immigrants she tutored in her ESL class and learned a significant amount about the challenges related to the immigration process through the eyes of immigrants. She found this tremendously valuable and commented that she no longer could understand her parents’ dislike of immigrants and concluded that it was borne out of ignorance, fear, and a lack of interaction with people from diverse backgrounds. She strove for something different for herself and decided to not only major in Spanish, but has made plans to study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country.

The theme of breaking the cycle of prejudice was echoed by numerous students, who referred to the importance of sharing the information they had learned with young children. Those who worked in projects where they served in some sort of mentoring capacity for children envisioned themselves as cultural and linguistic liaisons, responsible for teaching the next generation Spanish language skills, as well as imparting an appreciation and respect for cultural diversity. They expressed hope that this would help forge a greater respect for multiculturalism and help combat prejudice. In fact, one student was so profoundly impacted by her position as a volunteer in a bilingual classroom that she has decided to change her focus to bilingual education, sharing that she learned a tremendous amount about diversity and other life lessons from her students and was truly sad to have the experience end. Yet another student mentioned that the interactions he had had with Latinos during his 16-week project were more numerous and meaningful than those he had had in his entire 20 years of life in the small town where he was raised. He, too, spoke of plans to pursue Spanish as a field of study to be able to incorporate it into his future career in business.

Racial Diversity

For many, like the young man mentioned above, this experience is truly the first time that students have had the chance to have meaningful interactions with members of a different racial group than their own. As was previously mentioned, 85% of the student population in 2012 identified as “White” (non-Hispanic). Consequently, it is not uncommon for a majority of students in my Spanish courses to be Caucasian and of European descent. A fair number of students also hail from small towns around the state in which the University is located, also likely to have populations that are predominantly white, and consequently, they have had little or no experience with racial diversity prior to entering college. These facts, in my opinion, make service-learning experiences, such as the one outlined here, even more vital for not only teaching about diversity perspectives, but for providing experience with diversity. The reflections indicate that this is indeed the case, and for a number of students, the results are eye-opening. Service learning is often the first time that these individuals have found themselves in the position of racial or linguistic minority and by experiencing first-hand the resultant disorientation that often accompanies that position, they tend to display more empathy for people who are racial minorities in our society. Students also gained greater insight into immigration as an issue and showed much greater compassion for immigrants from Latin America.

Discussion

LEAP Learning Outcomes

Throughout this process, students made great strides toward achieving several of the ELO’s specified in the LEAP Initiative. Most notably, the results illustrate that students came out of this experience with a greater “knowledge of human cultures...,” specifically, the diverse Hispanic cultures that are prevalent in our area, as well as their own cultural backgrounds. Further, through in-depth reflection about their direct experiences with people from diverse backgrounds, I saw greater “intercultural knowledge and competence,” which was expressed through more cooperative language that broke down the “us-them” binary and began to shift the way students situated themselves in relation to other cultures. The division and boundary between themselves and those from varied backgrounds seemed more tenuous and less defined. Most encouraging, perhaps, was the expressed intent from a majority of participants to continue to seek out additional opportunities that would provide for connection and interaction with those from linguistically, racially, and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Areas for Improvement

While these results reflect the experiences of a
majority of my students, there were a few students who did not report such profound changes as a result of service learning or who did not enjoy the experience for a variety of reasons. The chief complaint came from students who, for one reason or another, found themselves not using the Spanish language as much as they had hoped while on site. They wanted more challenge and opportunity to interact with Hispanic individuals and expressed regret either for their site selection or for circumstances on-site that didn’t allow them ample opportunity to speak Spanish (for example, they may have spent time writing or reading Spanish or doing other language-related tasks). Others expressed disappointment with their supervisors, feeling as though they did not challenge them to use their skills on site to the extent that they had hoped they would. This was especially the case for a few students who volunteered at one particular school and found themselves observing more than actively engaging with students. The last complaint I heard was from a few students who chose sites outside of the city where the University is located and felt that at times, the time spent traveling to and from their sites detracted from the experience. They requested more opportunities in the city itself, which is something I am continually working to enhance through new and expanded partnerships. Overall, however, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive and this constructive criticism will only serve to improve the program for future semesters.

Recommendations

Despite the strides made in regards to using service learning as a high-impact practice to teach students about the diversity of the human experience and thereby incorporate several of the LEAP ELOs in my Spanish curriculum, questions still remain that I hope to explore in future semesters. As I mentioned at the outset, I take a pluralistic approach to service learning, allowing students to choose from a wide variety of projects to suit their individual needs. I know that some other practitioners structure their service learning around a single, common project for all members of the class, which is something I have yet to try. In thinking about the two approaches, I can see benefits and drawbacks to both styles. I think it would be particularly enlightening to repeat this study in the future using the common-project approach to compare results. A second area of inquiry that I intend to pursue revolves around the long-term impact of service learning. As I noted in the literature and demonstrated in my own results, service learning has been shown to positively affect students’ views about individuals from different backgrounds, making them more sensitive toward and tolerant of diversity. However, there is little that I have seen in the literature discussing how long these results hold true. I have not yet had the opportunity to undertake a longitudinal study to measure student viewpoints and actions related to diversity at different intervals post-service learning, but it raises important questions that I intend to study in the future. For example, do students’ linguistic gains continue or do they disappear once they are again in a traditional language classroom devoid of conversational opportunities with heritage Spanish speakers? Does professed open-mindedness about multiculturalism actually translate when applied to real-world situations? Do students act respectfully towards individuals of diverse backgrounds in future classes, jobs, volunteer sites, and other situations? For how long does this respect for diversity continue? Although I am optimistic that the gains reported in these areas will continue to positively impact both the students and those around them, I don’t have any concrete evidence to support that supposition and as such, it leaves open futures avenues for research.

Based on the feedback received from students, as well as my own reflections on this project, I have compiled a list of considerations for future service-learning projects so that I can continue to enhance the experience for all involved. In general, the following are recommendations for any practitioner to strengthen the learning experience for all students:

- Continue to work with partner agencies to reiterate student learning goals to ensure that the on-site experience is positive for all participants. This includes reiterating the goal of utilizing Spanish-language skills in meaningful ways and allowing students to participate actively in the agency activities. Specifically, I would recommend a mid-semester site-visit to address any questions or concerns that arise.
- Ask both students and community partners to share any issues or questions that they have on a more frequent basis. One idea would be to incorporate a comment/question section on the monthly timesheet that students and supervisors fill out to make sure that I can respond more quickly to issues that arise.
- Continually work to develop and expand...
local and regional partnerships so that students do not feel the need to choose an agency whose distance distracts from the learning experience.

- Add a quantitative survey to the post-service evaluation form so that, in addition to qualitative feedback from students, I also receive numerical data to measure several indicators of student learning and success.
- Develop a similar evaluation form for each agency to complete at the end of each semester. Currently, I ask supervisors for feedback via email, but I believe that a structured evaluation form might provide more meaningful measures of success.

Despite some of the drawbacks identified by students and myself, this study does show that in the context of a semester- or year-long class, service learning has proven to be an effective pedagogical method for teaching diversity perspectives in Spanish language classes. It illustrates precisely why service learning is such a high-impact practice: the experiential nature of these projects drive home lessons presented in class and make them “real” and tangible in a way that other methods simply do not. In the process, students are actively involved with diverse communities and encounter real-world challenges that allow them to learn more about human cultures and develop greater intercultural awareness and competence. This also gives them the opportunity to develop a well-rounded approach to education through valuable campus-community collaborations. According to Crutcher (2011), an education centered on the LEAP ELO’s provides students with the opportunity to hone the skills necessary to function as productive citizens in the world outside of college. He asserts that “a liberal education by design builds both capacity (rich knowledge, high-level skills, social imagination) and commitment (an examined sense of ethical and civic responsibility) to create and test responsible solutions—and to learn with and from others, not just ourselves” (p. 20). I would assert that this description is also apt for service learning itself, in that the give-and-take that occurs in the collaborative space between classroom and community challenges students to actively engage not only as students, but as citizens, both of the university community and of the diverse community that surrounds them, providing the foundation for future interaction, understanding, and partnership.

References


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Delivering Value to Community Partners in Service-Learning Projects

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Abstract

Service learning is a pedagogy wherein students engage in providing a service to the community that is linked to the academic objectives of a course. There are multiple stakeholders in the service-learning experience, including students, instructors, and community partners. A significant body of research investigates experiences of students and instructors, exploring the impact of service learning on student learning and describing how to effectively design service-learning courses. While community partners are indispensable stakeholders in service learning, there are only a few studies that examine their experiences and needs. The present study addresses this weakness in our understanding by conducting a qualitative study that examines the value of service learning to community partners. Findings describe the service-learning experience from the viewpoint of community partners and report the dimensions of value created for our community partners.

Introduction

Service learning engages students in course-related community service and enhances the classroom learning experience by requiring students to participate in activities that integrate course material with volunteer service (Petkus, Jr., 2000). Zlotkowski (1996) distinguished service learning from traditional internships by defining service learning as an experienced-based pedagogy that serves a community need and requires student reflection on the project. The structure and reflective component have been said to offer students “an effective curricular balance” (Post, Kundt, Mehl, Hudson, Stone, & Banks, 2009, p.18) to enhance ethics and values of a given area of study. Student tasks associated with service learning range from volunteering time with a community organization’s clients to crafting business strategy with the organization’s administration (Burns, 2011; Geringer, Stratemeyer, Canton, & Rice, 2009). Thus, service learning offers a valuable opportunity for students to implement their new skills in a real-world environment while also learning the importance of voluntarism (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Burns, 2011).

Student learning outcomes associated with service learning include developing the ability to apply basic course-related concepts, honing skills for problem solving, learning to work within a team, and developing an appreciation for diverse needs and challenges of organizations (Klink & Athaide, 2004). Previous research demonstrates the value of service learning for students’ mastery of course concepts (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998; Carson & Domangue, 2012; Hagenbuch, 2006; Shaw, 2007) and development of moral sensibilities (e.g., Warnell, 2010; Wilson, 2011). In addition, previous research provides guidance to instructors who wish to implement service learning in their courses (e.g., Klink & Athaide, 2004; Metcalf, 2010; Petkus, Jr., 2000), and examines the importance of matching community partner goals with project goals (Lester, Tomkovich, Wells, Flunker, & Kickul, 2005).

For students and faculty, the value of service learning can be measured in terms of students’ knowledge, skill, and attitude development as well as their satisfaction with the experience. However, it is possible to create value for students and faculty not only in successful service-learning projects, but also in projects that are unsuccessful in meeting all pre-stated goals. For example, Furlow (2010) reported on lessons learned in a class project where students designed a website for local businesses devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Gaining media attention for the website failed, but students were still enlightened by many aspects of the project, including the analysis of communication difficulties that led to the failure.

Service-learning projects require substantial investments from community partners who are typically involved throughout the course in planning, implementing, and evaluating the project (Conville & Kinnell, 2010; Schwartz & Fontenot, 2007). Projects that fail to meet the needs of community partners, or do not add value in other ways, may discourage future engagement. In
contrast, projects that are valuable to community partners can result in positive word-of-mouth that broadens the base of potential community partners and strengthens the viability of service learning. Given the importance of community engagement to service learning, it is surprising to find that service-learning research continues its heavy emphasis on student learning and pedagogy at the expense of community impacts (Vernon & Ward, 1999; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Thus, instructors are left with little insight on how to engage community partners in ways that deliver value, even though the ongoing commitment of our community partners is critical to the success of the service-learning pedagogy.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the existing community engagement literature by examining the value of service learning from the perspective of community partners. To that end, we report the results of a qualitative study aimed at answering two questions: (1) What is the nature of our community partners’ experiences in service-learning projects? (2) What is the value of service learning for our community partners? We begin with a review of the literature that examines the role of the community partner. Next, we describe our research method, and then we present our results. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of findings for designing service-learning courses that deliver value to community partners.

Community Partners in Service Learning

A defining characteristic of service learning is student engagement in activities that meet actual needs of the community partners (Campus Compact, 2003). Participating in a service-learning project involves extensive preparation for the community partner and the instructor prior to beginning the project. Together, they define objectives for student learning, design a structure for interaction between students and the community partner, and select assessment methods to monitor success. Then, students engage with the community partner to discover, define, and meet the community partner’s needs. The final component of the project, student reflection, takes place both while the project is ongoing and after the project is complete. Reflection encourages students to link the project with course concepts and to consider the importance of the project (Campus Compact, 2003).

The groundbreaking study by Vernon and Ward (1999) focused exclusively on the community partner in service learning. Using a multi-method research design, they examined the views of community partners related to service learning. Their findings indicated that community partners experience both benefits and challenges in working with service-learning students, and that agency personnel desire more coordination and communication on the part of their campus counterparts. They concluded that campuses are advised to move away from the “charity model approach” of service learning toward a social change paradigm in which the campus and community are equal partners (Vernon & Ward, 1999, p. 36).

Community partner benefit is mentioned in studies that consider the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders in service learning. For example, Hagenbuch (2006) collected data from community partners in his investigation of how service learning contributes to student benefit. Likewise, Lester et al. (2005) measured community partners’ perceptions of global benefits for both students and their organization’s clientele. Benefits of service-learning projects are described as mutual between community partners and students (Geringer, Stratemeyer, Canton, & Rice, 2009), where at a minimum students gain workplace skills and partner organizations gain access to those skills and knowledge. Most studies regarding service learning do not consider the financial benefit of service-learning projects, but Schwartz and Fontenot (2007) reported that the cash benefit to Habitat for Humanity equaled $3700 after marketing students worked to develop a fundraiser.

More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the nature of relationships between community partners and universities. Miron & Moely (2006) found that community partners reported higher levels of benefits to their agencies when they took a more active role in service-learning projects. Similarly, Sandy and Holland (2006) examined community partners’ views of campus-community partnerships and reported that community partners revealed a “surprising depth of understanding and commitment to student learning” (p. 30). Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison (2010) reminded us that “the terms ‘relationship’ and ‘partnership’ are not interchangeable” (p. 5). Stewart and Alrutz (2012) echoed their concern by urging universities to engage in transformative relationships with their community partners, rooted in shared understanding and reciprocity, rather than one-off, transaction-based projects. In transformative relationships, community partners decide jointly with instructors what the learning outcomes and service activities should be in order to simultaneously address classroom objectives and...
the needs of the community partner. This theoretical lens shifts the notion of service learning. Instead of one-way flows from universities to community partners, this theoretical lens advocates reciprocal resource flows between equal partners.

While it is clear in the literature that service learning has value for community partners, the nature of that value and its contributing factors are less clear. The goal of the current study is to develop an understanding of the value of service learning for community partners. The following section describes the research method employed to give voice to community partners’ views on the value of service learning.

Method

We designed a qualitative study to examine the value of service learning to community partners. The study involved in-depth exploration and comparative analyses across diverse experiences (i.e., different types of community partners, multiple instructors, various courses) to fully describe the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling was used to identify community partner informants. The aim of theoretical sampling is to “maximize opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, 202). Sample size is determined as the study progresses. The goal is to reach theoretical saturation, that is, the point where reports of the phenomenon are redundant and analysis of additional data would offer no new theoretical insight.

Sample

Nine community partners participated in the study. All nine community partners engaged in service-learning projects conducted at the same southwestern university within a 12-month time frame. Service learning is a point of distinction for the university, which is listed on the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement and the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. While all community partners participated in service learning at the same university, the projects spanned multiple disciplinary areas: three in business, two in art, two in family studies, one in architecture, and one in nutrition.

The sample comprised key community partners from three organizations providing social services for children, three agencies supporting families in crisis, an arts community, a food facility, and a hospital foundation, for a total of nine organizations. Five of the nine organizations are affiliated with national service organizations. The organizations range in size from 6 to 41 employees and serve as few as 18 corporate clients and as many as 12,000 individual clients per year. Community partners held managerial positions and served their organizations for an average of 11 years, with a range of 2 to 23 years. Four projects were discrete projects conducted in one semester, four were ongoing relationships spanning multiple semesters, and one was a new relationship expected to continue for more than one semester.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview protocol guided interviews (see Appendix A). Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the community partner’s office and ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A content analysis of interview transcripts was conducted to categorize descriptions of community partners’ service-learning experiences. Content analysis is a research method for the objective, systematic analysis of verbal data (Berelson, 1952; Kassarjian, 1977). Pre-defined codes were developed by the three-member research team, and coding rules were established to ensure consistency in the coding process. The interview protocol supplied 10 categories used in the content analysis. During the coding process, an 11th category emerged – the benefits of service learning to students – that was subsequently defined and coded in all transcripts (Table 1). The unit of analysis was a complete sentence; each unit could be coded under multiple categories.

Each transcript was independently coded by two members of the research team. The researchers were trained in the use of a software tool specifically designed for coding, indexing, and searching qualitative data (NVivo, 2010). The software tool ensured systematic organization of the data, consistent application of codes throughout the coding process, and the ability to retrieve entire categories of content. A training transcript was independently coded by all three researchers, and category definitions were subsequently refined as needed to assure clarity of category definitions and consistency in coding. Overall, the coders achieved 86% agreement across the nine transcripts. Although there is no absolute threshold for the level of inter-rater reliability, agreement in excess of 70% is deemed reliable (Kurasaki, 2000). Differences
were reviewed and resolved by consensus.

The research team applied standards for rigor in interpretive research to evaluate the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four criteria of the trustworthiness approach (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) correspond to the objective measures used in confirmatory, hypothesis-testing research (i.e., internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity). Credibility was ensured through the use of member checks in which researchers’ interpretations were examined and confirmed by community partners. Transferability was accomplished by collecting data from multiple types of agencies, projects, and disciplines. The use of software for reliable storage and systematic coding of data, tests of inter-rater reliability in coding, and the use of written protocols in data collection and data analysis provide evidence for dependability of findings. Confirmability was addressed through the use of multiple researchers to minimize bias.

Results
The Community Partner’s Experience

Interviews began with a grand tour question that allowed community partners to describe a specific service-learning experience, from beginning to end. Their responses depicted a step-wise process of five stages that progress from initial contact through the wrap-up of a project.

Stage 1 — initial contact. Community partners were asked directly about their motivations for engaging in service learning and involvement during the course of the service-learning experience. In some cases the projects were initiated by the community partner. For some, the impetus was school loyalty: “I graduated in the architecture department and so I went back to a couple of [instructors] that I had. … I requested assistance with a project.” Another stated, “I’m a [university] grad and while I was in both undergraduate and graduate school, I was very involved with a particular [instructor] who was a lot about community service.” Community partners also found instructors through the university-wide service-learning office: “Originally when the call was made to the Service Learning Center, it was to discuss the need that I had to have some help to teach a pre-natal education class…and as I talked to [the staff person], she told me about the college of art and she said, ‘Do you ever need any artwork done for anything?’ and I said, ‘Oh, yes. That would be amazing.’”

In other cases, organizations were contacted by instructors who were searching for service-learning projects for their courses: “When the first class started with us…they did contact the current volunteer coordinator at that time.” Also, “When [the instructor] actually contacted me, he heard about us and I had direct communication with them, and we just kind of set up what the parameters would be for the class.” In one case, the students contacted the community partner at the request of the instructor, “[The students] said that they were assigned by [the instructor] to do a community-involved project and they chose us.” Outcomes and enthusiasm for individual projects did not vary based on who initiated the relationship.

Stage 2 — establishing expectations. In most cases, the instructor and community partner met in advance of the semester to discuss needs, set expectations, and define the plan for the semester. Community partners frequently commented on the need for continued faculty oversight throughout the semester as a key to a success: “[We] started off in the spring, talking about expectations and what we were looking for in terms of needs of our marketing campaign. We identified some of those strengths, and [the faculty member] worked on passing those to the other [instructors], so that worked really well to have that advanced kind of planning session.”

Stage 3 — engaging students. In most cases, community partners met directly with the students who would be working with the organization to introduce the organization, explain how the

Table 1. Coding Categories and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Involvement</td>
<td>Service-learning project activities carried out by the organization and/or participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Facilitators</td>
<td>Activities, processes, or materials that made it easy to engage in the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Challenges</td>
<td>Issues that make the project more difficult and/or ways to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Motivation</td>
<td>Reasons given for engaging in service-learning project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Outcomes</td>
<td>Expected or actual results of the service-learning project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Evaluation</td>
<td>Positive or negative assessments of the service-learning project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Value</td>
<td>Assessment of worth of the service-learning project to the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Benefits/Organization</td>
<td>Positive outcomes for the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Benefits/Representative</td>
<td>Positive outcomes for the organization’s representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Benefits/Students</td>
<td>Positive outcomes for student volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Future intentions</td>
<td>Positive outcomes for student volunteers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
organization works, and discuss the needs of the organization. In some cases this was done in the classroom: “We actually came in and did an orientation with the class, and there were probably about 30 or so students, and that really helps to educate them a little bit more about what [the organization] does.” In other cases, community partners met with smaller groups or one-on-one: “We began to meet [with the students] and form our ideas and we noticed that this was a need that we had at [the organization] and so we developed the mentoring program.”

Stage 4 — implementing the project. Community partners reported multiple levels of interaction across the project time frame. As previously stated, the three primary stakeholders in service learning are the instructor, the students, and the community partner. The interviews revealed interactions with a fourth stakeholder — the client of the community partner — which is discussed in more detail subsequently. Community partners described ongoing coordination between themselves and the instructors: “[The instructor] was very thoughtful of us, and he coordinated with us, and was very easy to work with. Good professors are key, I think.”

The community partners described contact throughout the semester between themselves and the students: “[A student] was always helping us rearrange the seating for our shows, and helping find cost effective ways of selling our tickets for our auditorium.” Interaction was also reported between the students and the clients served by the community partner’s organization. One community partner had this to say about a mentoring program set up by a group of MBA students: “These kids [the organization’s clients] see these college students coming and interacting with them…the more interaction with the kids, the better it is, even for us.”

In describing how the projects unfolded throughout the semester, the majority of the community partners commented on how eager, creative, smart students make all the difference. This statement sums it up well: “I could just see light bulbs going off in their heads as they were listening and whenever they went off to their teams and talked about things.”

Stage 5 — wrapping up. Depending on the nature of the project, some community partners were presented with final reports, while others did not see the students again after the projects were completed. One community partner listened to nine proposals and voted on which was best: “We had to attend all of their final presentations that culminated all of their knowledge, so it was kind of working hand-in-hand with classroom experience.” Another listened to three presentations: “I think it went really well, it was really fun, and the last three sessions they brought us in and they did their pitch to us as if we were a real client.” A few community partners discussed having a debriefing session to discuss what did and did not work: “At the end of the semester we did a wrap-up. I went to their class and spoke, and we talked about what the experience had been and how they helped us.” While a wrap-up was not reported by the majority of community partners, those who had this experience reported it to be a very valuable component of their service-learning experience.

Although many community partners said they did not receive a tangible outcome from the project, at least a few did: “They gave us a campaign book with their slogan, their strategy, a budget, and we also gave them a mock budget, so that is what they built their campaign around.” Of those who did not receive a tangible report, some expressed a desire for closure after the project. One community partner stated,

It would be kind of nice to get a little bit of feedback from them [the students], even if it is some type of generic survey that we come up with or something, really, about their time here, and see if it really benefited them, and to see what they got out of it.

Another said, “I would like to know where they end up and know if they are using some of the knowledge they gained while they were here and in their professional lives.”

The Value of Service Learning for Community Partners

Community partners were encouraged to report the value of service learning to their organizations as well as to themselves. In doing so, they readily talked about direct benefits to the organization and the organization’s clients. While there was no question to elicit their views on the benefits of service learning to students, they readily expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to student learning.

Direct benefits of service-learning projects. Community partners often described the immediate benefits of service-learning participation in terms of the extra hands of volunteers to carry out
the daily work of their organizations in the face of resource constraints: “We’re a nonprofit organization, and so we have a small staff, and so the … relief that they’ve been able to provide in the normal daily tasks has been great for the organization.” Student volunteers were described as energetic and willing to do whatever needed doing, often going well beyond the community partner’s expectations by helping with fundraisers and awareness events.

In addition to volunteer hours, community partners recounted the benefit of access to expertise beyond the capabilities of their organizations: “Working in a college community has a lot of perks because any of those research questions you have, you don’t have to do it yourself; you can use a student or class.” One project specifically addressed the use of social media to raise brand awareness for the organization:

Our expectation was to really help us look at new social media strategies … and to, as far as brand recognition, to see if people knew about us or not. … We also were hoping to glean from them some new ideas of how to spin volunteering for [this agency] to the public.

Community partners expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to “engage young minds … and recruit some creative thinkers” to address issues facing their organizations. Even when projects did not produce the expected results, community partners reported that the process provided new perspectives and information to “chew on in our staff meetings.” As one community partner summed up: “Strategies some of us had never even thought of before are now going through our minds.”

Supporting the organization’s mission. The most powerful stories told by community partners described the value of service learning in helping their organizations to achieve their missions. The students themselves were described as invaluable resources that facilitate “life-changing experiences” for clients:

Because the children here … face extreme hurdles, and part of what assists them in overcoming those hurdles is having a positive role model, and so … we’re able to provide such a life-saving, or life-changing, experience for our kids here that it really has had positive impacts on the families.

Service learning provided the necessary support for one agency to launch a mentoring program with university students as mentors to children from dysfunctional homes:

One client, for example, did not have custody of her children … her child was coming to the mentoring room and therapy …. And [because of] the positive impact that the mentoring program was having on her son … she regained full custody of her son. They are still coming to mentoring, still coming to counseling, and their lives are rejoined. So that is one specific instance in which mentoring saved a relationship between a mom and her son.

One agency completely reorganized to incorporate the availability of students engaged in service learning into its business model in order to serve clients more efficiently and effectively: “We would have waiting lists that were just endless. … Now with the program revamped, … we usually don’t have a waiting list …. This has been wonderful for our clients because they have been able to get the services they needed quickly.”

Serving the students. An unexpected finding was the extent to which community partners readily talked about how much they valued the opportunity to be involved in students’ learning and development. As one alumna said, “I wanted to come back … and help students learn just like I did whenever I was a student.” Another reported that service learning was “an extremely valuable experience for me, so I like to be the promoter of continuing that sort of actual hands-on type of community learning experience for students.”

Non-alumni also valued the opportunity to provide “real-world” experience for students: “I did want to get those students that experience of actually doing a presentation in front of someone who was a businessperson … I wanted them to have that opportunity.” Community partners described the intrinsic satisfaction gained in guiding students as they discover their vocations:

I enjoy watching them grow, and start to think about, ‘Am I really about to do this?’ And really make some decisions here about what they are going to do once they finish. So that is really wonderful to watch that process.

Although the majority of community partners
reported positive outcomes and evaluations, the service-learning experience was not without challenges. The most frequently mentioned frustration was students who waited until the last minute and did not follow deadlines: “It seems at the end of the semester, [the students] all show up at the same time to get their credit in.” Another contact person for a project said the students were “not very good at planning, so they would wait until the last minute to ask for assistance…they would contact us Friday night and want to know if we could answer the questions for them.” The community partners were careful to communicate that this was not the case for all students, “there were just some of those instances, but it wasn’t that many at all.” Another called it an “age-old problem.”

Discussion
The goal of this research was to understand the value of service learning to community partners. Community partners described five stages in their experiences of service-learning projects: (1) initial contact; (2) establishing expectations; (3) engaging students; (4) implementing the project, and; (5) wrapping up. In describing this process, community partners provide insight into factors that set the stage for a valuable service-learning experience from their perspective. First, they expressed the need for continuous faculty oversight of projects. Competent faculty members who conscientiously plan for and monitor the project are crucial to success. Faculty should, therefore, be prepared to commit the necessary time to coordinate activities with the community partner and to supervise student participation in the project. To prevent misunderstandings, instructors are advised to clearly outline the time commitment in advance for all parties including the community partner, the instructor, and the students. Second, community partners reported the value of participating in the initiation of the project by conducting an orientation for students. Engagement early in the course results in clear communication about expectations for the service-learning project.

Community partners described three dimensions of the value of service-learning projects: (1) direct benefits to the organization; (2) support of the mission, and; (3) serving the students. Direct benefits included volunteer hours and access to expertise. For community partners with limited resources, service-learning projects provide assistance that the organization otherwise could not financially afford. However, the benefit of additional volunteer hours and access to expertise is sometimes diluted by the cost of managing students’ propensity to procrastinate. Faculty can address this issue by structuring deadlines within the project. For example, volunteer hours could be distributed across the course with bi-weekly deadlines to avoid the end-of-semester rush. Similarly, problem-based projects with tangible outcomes can be staged to require students to submit portions of final reports as the semester progresses, instead of submitting everything at the end of the term.

The most important dimension of value for community partners was the extent to which service-learning projects support the organization’s mission. When community partners were in need of solutions, students brought fresh perspectives and new energy. Service learning delivers the highest level of value for community partners when there is synergy between the mission of the organization and the goals of the service-learning project. Thus, faculty are advised to design service-learning projects with careful attention to the relationship between the project and the community partner’s mission.

A significant finding is the value community partners place on their role as mentors and co-teachers in service-learning projects. Community partners expressed a sincere dedication to the students and their learning experiences. Similar to faculty, community partners value the opportunity to design and implement projects that deliver high-quality learning experiences for students. Hence, it is important for faculty to provide feedback on the knowledge and skills the students are gaining from the projects. Community partners value closure on the projects. Therefore, instructors are advised to design service-learning courses in a way that allows students to report their learning to community partners, such as formal presentations or final reflection papers. Moreover, it is desirable for instructors to schedule debriefings with their community partners to close the loop on the experience. Giving community partners closure increases their perception of value, which, in turn, facilitates an ongoing relationship with the community partner and ensures positive word-of-mouth to other potential community partners.

Limitations and Further Research
The limitations of this study point to directions for further research. Findings suggest multiple dimensions of value for community partners as well as a set of factors that contribute to creating value. A survey could be developed to measure
the various dimensions of value and to test the relationship between value and contributing factors. Survey research could address the limitation of generalizability of findings that is inherent in the qualitative design employed in the present study. The present study was conducted in a southwestern U.S. university town. Findings could be different for similar studies conducted in other regions of the country, or other countries, with different underlying cultural norms and values. Such studies might discover additional dimensions of value or identify other factors that predict value creation for community partners.

Conclusion

Based on the preliminary findings of this study, courses involving service learning should include the following:

• Early involvement of the community partner; a meeting prior to the start of the project to establish expectations in recommended.
• Close attention to the alignment of service-learning project goals with the mission of the organization.
• Continuous faculty oversight of the project.
• Providing closure to the community partner; communicating how the project benefited students is warranted.
• Formal distribution of student volunteer hours and/or staggered deadlines across the semester to avoid the end of semester rush.

Service learning is pedagogy with the potential for powerful impact on students, faculty, and community partners. It is our hope that findings in this study will be useful in advancing our understanding of how to design service-learning projects that deliver value to all stakeholders.

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**About the Authors**

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*Students in a project about the value of service learning to community partners present their findings to their client.*
Appendix A. Interview Protocol

Community Partner Demographic Information
- Let’s start by having you tell me your job title. What do you do for [your organization]? How long have you worked for [your organization]? How long have you done this kind of job (in any organization)?

Project Information
- According to our records, you were involved with a course taught by Dr. ____ in the College of ____ in (give approximate time frame). If you will, I would like for you to just tell me about that experience from start to finish, starting with how you got involved, how it unfolded, and ending with what happened at the end of the semester and the results of the project.

Probes
- Were you the contact person on this project? Were there other people within your organization that were involved? How were those other people involved?
- Could you think about and share with me some specifics from the experience that you think worked well?
- Were there things that did not work well? Is there anything that you would change or do differently? How would you improve those things that did not work well?
- Was there a physical outcome of the project? Sometimes this takes the form of written reports, posters, physical materials for projects, and things like that. Did the students or professor give you anything that serves as evidence of the project?

Value of the Project
- What were your expectations going into the project?

Probes
- What was your original motivation for being involved in this project?
- Did the resulting project meet your expectations, come up short, or exceed your expectations?
- What impact do you think this project had on the organization?
- What impact do you think this project had on you personally?
- Now I’m going to ask you to speculate about the value of the project. If you were to hire an outside company or organization to do the things that the students did for this project, what do you think the results of this project would be worth in that capacity? In other words, try to do your best to put a dollar value on what the project is worth to your organization.

- If given the opportunity, would you do the service-learning project again? Why or why not?

Wrap Up
- I think I’ve asked all of the questions I had. Is there anything I haven’t asked that I need to know if I want to understand the university-community partner relationship better?
Academic-Community Partnerships: Effectiveness Evaluated Beyond the Ivory Walls

Rosemary M. Caron, Jessica D. Ulrich-Schad, and Catherine Lafferty

Abstract

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) has furthered our understanding of the working principles required for academic-community partnerships to address persistent public health problems. However, little is known about how effective these partnerships have been in eliminating or reducing community-based public health issues. To contribute to the literature in this area, the authors conducted a survey of U.S. schools and programs in public health and community groups working with these academic partners to: (1) identify the most common local public health issues addressed; (2) examine the characteristics of the partnership and the actual or perceived benefits and challenges for each partner; (3) assess the perceived effectiveness of the partnership and their evaluation techniques; and (4) analyze the intent to continue or dissolve the partnership and the associated factors that influence this decision. The authors provide recommendations that can improve the development, functioning, and effectiveness of academic-community collaborations aimed at addressing a variety of public health concerns.

Introduction

Winslow (1920) defined public health as:

…the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting physical health and efficacy through organized community efforts for the sanitation of the environment, the control of community infections, the education of the individual in principles of personal hygiene, the organization of medical and nursing services for the early diagnosis and preventive treatment of disease, and the development of the social machinery which will ensure every individual in the community a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health; … (p. 183).

Winslow’s critical work still accurately reflects the mission of public health today. An essential, modern tool in fulfilling the public health mission is the academic-community partnership. Academic-community partnerships are relationships between community organizations and academic institutions with the goal of building the community’s capacity to address community-level issues, including public health matters that may affect a population’s quality of life (Lesser & Oscos-Sanchez, 2007; O’Fallon & Dearry, 2002). By engaging multiple stakeholders with common interests in a specific community, these partnerships are better equipped with the financial resources, human and social capital, and organizational resources to address local public health concerns (Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001; Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001).

However, there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships in alleviating the public health concerns they seek to address (El Ansari & Weiss, 2006; El Ansari, Phillips & Hammick, 2001; Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). There have been many studies that document the purpose, or goals, of such partnerships and the best practices required for effective partnerships, but few either systematically or empirically evaluate the impacts of these interventions on public health outcomes. Some studies have assessed the perceived effectiveness of programs in alleviating public health concerns, but even fewer use experimental or quasi-experimental research designs to rigorously test program effectiveness. The studies that have assessed the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships are often focused on a select number of health concerns, lack a truly experimental design in their evaluations, and focus on a small number of communities or particular sub-populations.

The lack of evidence about the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships in addressing public health matters stems in part from the difficulties associated with disentangling the effects of other factors from the effects of the partnerships themselves. For example, it is difficult to discern, without using experimental evaluative methodologies, whether the practices implemented...
by the collaborations themselves or other extraneous factors, such as changing social norms, economic fluctuations, availability of resources, etc. are having a greater effect. It is also challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of some programs because public health benefits can take a long period of time to be realized (Eisinger & Senturia, 2001; Israel, Schulz, Parker, Becker, Allen, & Guzman, 2005). Additionally, because local contexts matter in community-level research, it can be challenging, and time and resource consuming, to use comparative research methods (e.g., control and experimental groups) to assess program outcomes. Finally, what is defined as an indicator of collaboration success is sometimes up for debate (El Ansari, et al, 2001; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Specifically, El Ansari et al. (2001) consider the primary challenges confronting the evidence on effective collaborative efforts to include: the diversity of perspectives, multiplicity of conceptual facets, difficulty in measurement of notions, selectivity of macro- or micro-evaluation, variety of proximal or distal indicators, array of short and long-term effects, assortment of individual-level or collective outcomes, measuring a moving target, suitability of randomized controlled trials, and requirement of mixed methods evaluation.

CBPR is a common method implemented by academic and community partners to address community-level issues. It is defined as:

...a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community, has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities (W.K.Kellogg Foundation, 2001).

CBPR has furthered our understanding of the working principles required for academic-community partnerships to address persistent public health problems together. However, little is known about how effective these academic-community partnerships, particularly those using CBPR, are at eliminating or reducing community-based public health issues. To contribute to the literature in this area, we conducted an online survey of both academic and community partners throughout the U.S. to evaluate: (1) the development and functioning of academic-community partnerships that address public health issues; and (2) the perceived effectiveness of academic-community partnerships in reducing public health issues pertinent to their community. By conducting a survey of both academic and community partners, we gain a better understanding of the local public health issues being addressed, the characteristics of partnerships working to address these issues, including whether the partnership utilizes CBPR principles, and most importantly, whether or not the partnerships have been able to alleviate public health concerns. The overall purpose of this work is to: (1) inform the development and functioning of new collaborative relationships between communities and academic institutions aimed at addressing important community-based issues; and (2) provide recommendations that can improve the effectiveness of academic-community collaborations in solving a variety of public health concerns.

Methods

Survey Sample and Design

To assess the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships in addressing public health concerns, we developed and conducted a formal, online, anonymous survey of directors of all Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)-accredited schools and programs of public health, as well as leaders of community organizations. Based on an extensive literature review of academic-community partnerships addressing local public health issues, survey questions were prepared regarding the development, functioning, and effectiveness of such partnerships. The surveys were pilot tested among a small group (n=10) of academicians in the public health field and community organization representatives (n=10) across the country. The reviewers provided feedback on survey content and length that improved the content validity of our survey instrument before its implementation. Appendices A and B include the survey instruments for academic and community partners, respectively.

Sampling Methodology

The e-mails for directors of schools and programs of public health were collected from the CEPH website and individual accredited public health program and school websites. The sample of academic partners included 48 directors of CEPH-accredited schools and 82 directors of CEPH-accredited programs in public health in the U.S. The sample of community partners was compiled by sending announcements on publicly available and moderated CBPR listservs for academic-community
partnerships. The survey was created by employing SurveyMonkey, an electronic survey tool. The invitation letter to participate in the survey was e-mailed to each director and posted on the CBPR listservs. If directors or community representatives were unable or unwilling to participate, we asked them to refer us to other representatives of their school/organization who were knowledgeable about the partnership(s) their school/organization was involved in. The respondents accessed the survey by clicking on a hyperlink that would open the electronic survey. The participant’s responses were downloaded and saved to space designated on the University of New Hampshire’s server. The survey took ten to fifteen minutes to complete. We used skip logic to allow respondents to skip over questions that they determined were irrelevant to their situation. Therefore, the denominator for responses to each question only reflects respondents that chose to answer that question.

The survey was implemented during the Spring 2012 semester, traditionally a busy time for academic institutions. The survey remained accessible for respondents to complete for ten weeks. Every two weeks a reminder was e-mailed to directors who had not yet taken the survey. Reminders to complete the survey were also posted every two weeks on the CBPR listservs for leaders of community organizations.

Survey Instrument

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Hampshire. The survey was comprised of 25 various question types including closed- and open-ended questions. While the general content of the survey questions for the academic and community partners were equivalent, question wording varied for appropriateness and context. The survey was divided into six sections comprised of questions that attempted to: (a) identify the local public health issues being addressed; (b) examine the characteristics of the partnership; (c) assess the actual or perceived benefits and challenges for each partner; (d) determine the perceived effectiveness of the partnership; (e) assess the methodology implemented by the partnership to determine its success; and (f) analyze the intent to continue or dissolve the partnership and the associated factors that influence this decision.

Data Analysis

Data from the completed surveys were downloaded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 17.0, and Microsoft Excel 2007. Quantitative responses were evaluated using descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis was used to evaluate open-ended response questions. The text from these responses was examined using content analysis software, QSR NVivo, version 9. Nueendorf (2002) defines content analysis “…as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics.” This method codes the text into manageable categories by theme. Specifically, the responses to the following survey questions were quantified via percentages: identification of partners for both academic institutions and community organizations; main public health issue the partnership is addressing; role of the partner in the partnership; utilization of CBPR principles in the partnership; method of conflict resolution implemented; type of activity necessary to sustain the partnership’s work; the types of activities utilized to address the public health issue in the community; partner’s perception of a positive outcome in their community as a result of their partnership; perception of the effectiveness of the partnership; challenges encountered by the partnership; and whether or not the partners planned to continue their partnership. Qualitative analysis for the following survey questions were analyzed via thematic identification: positive outcomes of the partnership; the evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the partnership; challenges encountered by the partnership; and lessons learned to date from the academic-community partnership. Both quantitative and qualitative results are presented throughout the results section.

Results

One hundred and seventy one survey responses were received: 131 respondents represented academic partners and 40 respondents represented community partners.

Academic partners identified that their community partners (multiple communities in some cases) primarily came from non-profit organizations (55.4%), community coalitions (55.4%), community advisory boards (42.1%), and local health departments (32.2%). Community partners identified that their academic partners (multiple academic partners in some cases) primarily came from schools of public health (47.4%), medical schools (34.2%), programs of public health (23.7%), and departments of community health (26.3%). Academic and community respondents identified chronic disease (15.2%), childhood obesity (11.7%) and access to healthcare (7.0%) as the top three public health issues their partnerships were working to address.
The majority of respondents (academic partners, 69.0%; community partners, 66.7%) reported serving in the role of “convener” for the development of their specific academic-community partnership. Using a closed-ended survey question, about two-thirds of academic partners (72.2%) reported that their partnership operated via CBPR principles, whereas only one-third (33.3%) of community partners reported that their partnership operated via these participatory principles. One academic partner reported that CBPR principles were used in their partnership, “…but not in all phases” of the work. One community respondent stated that “Although academics tend to think in specific content areas, community members think in terms of the whole health of their neighborhoods. Academics interested in this type of work really need to understand this.” Furthermore, one-third (33.3%) of community partners engaged in an academic-community partnership reported not knowing about CBPR principles. One community partner reported that “The answer is yes and no [to using CBPR principles] due to the fact that the academic-community partnership does not have a clear understanding of CBPR; and [how to take] the community on as an equal partner.” In addition, academic (79.5%) and community partners (61.8%) reported that for conflicts that arose in their partnership, consistent attempts by both partners via face-to-face communication were the main method of resolution. Lastly, for both partners, applying for grants offered by federal agencies was the primary method by which to obtain the resources necessary to conduct their work (academic partner, 68.2%; community partner, 76.5%). Application to funding opportunities from private foundations and organizations was another common approach to acquire the necessary resources (academic partner, 51.8%; community partner, 50.0%).

Table 1 presents the types of activities academic-community partnerships utilized to address public health issues in their community. The most common activities included the use of surveys (60.2%), focus groups (57.9%), interviews (61.4%), and working with healthcare providers (52.0%). Other activities (28.7%) included conducting community forums, implementing leadership training, and intervention development and evaluation.

When academic and community partners were asked whether or not they perceived a positive outcome in their community as a result of their partnership, both partners believed there was a greater awareness of the public health issue in the community (academic partner, 79.2%; community partner, 76.5%), as well as opportunities for funding (academic partner, 53.8%; community partner, 47.1%) as a result of their work (Table 2). Other positive outcomes identified by academic and community partners included new legislation, policy development, grant writing skills, peer-reviewed publications, and increased participation community-wide in addressing public health issues. Several respondents reported that their academic-community partnership resulted in an actual outcome of the public health issue being addressed in their community. For example, “…teen pregnancy rates have gone from 50% to 20% [among] high school girls in 4 years”; “declaration of city as HIV disaster area”; “increased screening of children for lead exposure”; and a “measurable decrease in substance use in the community in question.”

Table 3 illustrates the challenges encountered by academic and community partners. Both partners identified a lack of financial resources (academic partner, 70.2%; community partner, 70.6%), lack of time for the project (academic partner, 51.0%; community partner, 52.9%), and building infrastructure (academic partner, 38.5%; community partner, 29.4%) as the main challenges experienced by their partnership. Additional themes that aca-

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**Table 1. Representative activities academic-community partnerships engage in to address public health issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Academic Partners</th>
<th>Community Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular School Meetings</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Outlets</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Legislature</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Healthcare Providers</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Percentage of respondents who report positive partnership outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership Outcome</th>
<th>Academic Partner</th>
<th>Community Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater awareness of public health issue</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of exposure to public health issue</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of Public Health Issue</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued Funding</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Know</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The academic and community partners identified as being challenges to their work included the geographic distance between the academic institution and the community, institutional risk, sustaining involvement, attrition, and lack of acknowledgement of community-based work for academic promotion. One academic respondent shared a specific challenge: “…it’s hard to find academic partners who are adequately trained in community engagement, who are culturally competent, and who are able to utilize principles of CBPR and PAR [participatory action research] in a truly collaborative way. Most academic partners remain hierarchical, and some of our more visionary partners are junior faculty who face significant pressure from their tenure committees to stick to ‘traditional’ research (particularly for fields outside of public health).”

Using an open-ended survey question, academic and community partners were asked to identify how they evaluate the effectiveness of their partnership. Several themes emerged regarding evaluation methods utilized by the partnerships including the number and extent to which partners were involved as determined by their attendance at meetings, types of stakeholders with whom partners were sharing information, increased utilization of services by community members, number of requests to develop partnerships with new partners, and partnership sustainability and retention.

Table 4 presents the overall perceived effectiveness of the respondents’ academic-community partnership. The majority of academic and community partners reported that they perceived their partnership to be “somewhat effective” (academic partner, 54.8%; community partner, 55.9%) or “very effective” (academic partner, 24.0%; community partner, 23.5%) at addressing public health issues in their community. One academic respondent stated an actual improvement as a result of their partnership, “We have been able to enhance the knowledge, skills, abilities and competence of our public health workforce. We have also been able to strengthen partnerships between community members. We have been able to build trust of the academic institution in the community. We have been able to bridge public health and primary care.”

Academic and community partners reported that they planned on continuing their partnership in the future (academic partner, 90.6%; community partner, 82.7%). The majority of respondents reported that their partnership had either met some of the objectives it had established (academic partner, 62.1%; community partner, 41.4%) or they were still in the process of meeting their objectives (academic partner, 23.2%; community partner, 31.0%). One academic respondent stated, “Our goal is to establish academic/community partnerships that are on-going, not just based on one project....” Another community respondent stated an actual outcome: “I’d like to say [our goals have been] completely reached, but that would imply there’s nowhere to go from here, which is impossible. We’ve exceeded the goals we’ve set for ourselves at this point, but are always creating new ones.”

Academic and community participants were asked to describe the lessons learned to date from their respective academic-community partnership. The overarching theme that emerged from the participants’ responses was the importance of implementing the working principles of CBPR. Other themes included the role of funding, effective communication, adaptability among partners, partners as co-learners, and working from a common ground and towards a common goal. Table 5 highlights these main themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Academic Partner</th>
<th>Community Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Effective</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Effective nor</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Ineffective</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Ineffective</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Representative Activities Academic-Community Partnerships Engage in to Address Public Health Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Select Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. CBPR Working Principles (i.e., time, trust, mutual respect)       | “Community engagement is more than making a few phone calls to potential partners; it involves continual presence of the academic institution in the community of locale.”
|                                                                      | “Understand clearly the expectations of the community partner, and discuss explicitly the expectations of the academic partner.”
|                                                                      | “Because I have been in this community for several years and have done some past work with the academic partner, I always keep my guard up with them. I do this because of past experience where I felt like they took advantage of the community and the community members and/or they get what they need and they leave. They have the resources and skills to obtain funding for projects but it may not be what the community organization is focusing on or has a need. While this can be viewed positively in that it may stretch the organization to think outside the box, this can/does result in poor sustainability.”
|                                                                      | “…one at the table learns something; as academic partners we are not there to ‘teach’ the community partners.”
|                                                                      | “…Successful programs integrate well community and academic knowledge and expertise.”
|                                                                      | “Collaboration takes time! If the process is good the product is great! We all learn a great deal from each other.”
|                                                                      | “…Given that science and the community frequently have mixed agendas, it is crucial to agree upon common goals and common ground.”
|                                                                      | “Obtain from the academic partnership a detailed account of their requirements before committing to working with them. Clarify in advance roles and expectation of each member of the academic and community team. Take the time to consult with everyone who might have a say in your community/organization before committing to a partnership.”
|                                                                      | “The roles of each partner must be clearly established, agreed upon and frequently re-evaluated to ensure equal and positive engagement.”
|                                                                      | “Funding opportunities frequently don’t match the needs of the community. A community voice in funding priority decisions is needed.”
|                                                                      | “This work cannot be done effectively without the unconditional support of the University/SPH [School of Public Health] committing to faculty and student participation and funding to get projects well established.”
|                                                                      | “It is hard to sustain programs once funded and research ends, but building on existing community infrastructure and providing adequate resources are critical to success.”
| 2. Partners as co-learners                                           | “Leaving ‘titles’ at the door is important for leveling the playing field. Every one at the table learns something; as academic partners we are not there to ‘teach’ the community partners.”
|                                                                      | “…Successful programs integrate well community and academic knowledge and expertise.”
|                                                                      | “Collaboration takes time! If the process is good the product is great! We all learn a great deal from each other.”
| 3. Establish common ground and goals                                 | “…Given that science and the community frequently have mixed agendas, it is crucial to agree upon common goals and common ground.”
|                                                                      | “Obtain from the academic partnership a detailed account of their requirements before committing to working with them. Clarify in advance roles and expectation of each member of the academic and community team. Take the time to consult with everyone who might have a say in your community/organization before committing to a partnership.”
|                                                                      | “The roles of each partner must be clearly established, agreed upon and frequently re-evaluated to ensure equal and positive engagement.”
| 4. Funding for the establishment of the partnership, development, implementation, and sustainability of the work | “Funding opportunities frequently don’t match the needs of the community. A community voice in funding priority decisions is needed.”
|                                                                      | “This work cannot be done effectively without the unconditional support of the University/SPH [School of Public Health] committing to faculty and student participation and funding to get projects well established.”
|                                                                      | “It is hard to sustain programs once funded and research ends, but building on existing community infrastructure and providing adequate resources are critical to success.”
| 5. Effective and ongoing communication                               | “…Consistent communication is important… Face-to-face and not just e-mail communication is important.”
|                                                                      | “Value of listening. Value of communication. Patience.”
|                                                                      | “build trust first…share results asap…keep open the lines of communication.”
| 6. Adaptability among partners                                       | “Don’t give up. Support the community so they can participate fully in all aspects, despite some people kicking and complaining about having to have so many people at meetings and having to get everything translated…”
|                                                                      | “Remain flexible and remind ourselves that resources and personnel may change mid-project.”
|                                                                      | “Be willing to revise expectations.”
community partners were also asked about how their partnership could be more effective. Both partners agreed that accessing more financial resources (academic partner, 55.1%; community partner, 44.8%); accessing more human resources (academic partner, 44.9%; community partner, 34.5%); and spending more time on the project (academic partner, 36.7%; community partner, 17.2%) may improve their effectiveness.

Discussion

“They are very time intensive but the outcomes/improvements can be very rich and long-lasting.” - Community Respondent

Recent research has evaluated the effectiveness of community partnerships in addressing public health concerns. These studies have focused on issues such as cancer and heart disease, reducing tobacco use (Green, Daniel, & Novick, 2001) and increasing vaccination rates (Coady et al., 2008). Evaluation of the effectiveness of community organizations that partner with academic institutions to address local public health issues are beginning to appear with more frequency in the peer-reviewed literature. One example includes work conducted by Ndirangu, Yadrick, Bogle, & Graham-Krege (2008) that assessed the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships involved in implementing nutrition interventions in three communities in the Lower Mississippi Delta. A second example is work conducted by Levine, Bone, Hill, Stallings, Gelber, Barker, Harris, Zeger, Felix-Aaron, & Clark (2003) that provides evidence for empirically evaluated positive outcomes of academic-community partnerships in a four year randomized clinical trial investigating the effectiveness of a health center partnership in decreasing the blood pressure levels among an urban African-American population.

Despite the difficulties surrounding the rigorous evaluation of the interventions implemented by academic-community partnerships, our work contributes to this body of knowledge by examining the development and functioning of such partnerships that address public health issues, as well as evaluating their perceived effectiveness in reducing specific public health issues pertinent to the community.

Our findings highlight that academic-community collaborations are comprised of partners that represent multiple aspects of academia (e.g., departments, schools, institutes) and community (e.g., community-based organizations, community advisory boards, health departments). Each partner views the public health issue in the community through a different lens based on their experience, knowledge, skills, and ability. Thus, we propose that each partner involved in the collaboration should have a clear understanding of the expectations and governance of a multi-stakeholder partnership. To facilitate this proposal, we recommend that CBPR principles be implemented when such partnerships are just forming so that potential misunderstandings may be avoided at a later stage of the work. Training and the practice of the CBPR principles of open communication, trust, and mutual respect for the knowledge, expertise, and resources of all partners involved takes time to develop so training on these working partnership principles should be instituted early (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Similarly, Maura & Goldenberg (1996) reported principles they found essential for their academic-community partnership experience in improving the health of residents in Ohio. These principles include leadership, partnership, and empowerment among all participants (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006).

Every community is different and we propose that more can be accomplished in addressing community-based public health issues by utilizing the strengths within that community. Academic-community partnerships represent a part of the “village” it takes to improve community health and we recommend that the time necessary for such relevant collaborations to foster should be built into the academic-community partnership development process. The amount of “time” it takes for such a collaboration to function will vary community by community due to the dynamic nature of the population and the existing public health issues.

A majority of academic-community partnerships reported that they were “somewhat” or “very effective” in addressing public health issues in their community. Examples of their effectiveness included “a greater awareness” of the public health issue in the community. We recommend that implementing a measure of effectiveness be considered by such partnerships that are conducting time- and labor-intensive work. We argue that raising the awareness about a public health issue is often the first step needed to initiate sustainable change and should be viewed as a milestone in the progression and evaluation of the academic-community partnership’s work. Certainly a sustained intervention that reduces or eliminates the public health issue of concern would also be considered a great success (for example, the significant decrease in the teenage pregnancy rate as reported by one respondent; and the increase in lead screening rates among children as reported by another respondent).
but it is important to acknowledge and evaluate those accomplishments that may not appear major at first glance.

It is also important to note that these varied academic-community partnerships reported their work as being “somewhat” or “very effective” in the face of barriers also experienced by the private and not-for-profit sectors, i.e., a lack of financial resources, a lack of time for the project, and a lack of building infrastructure (e.g., memorandum of understanding, standard processes, communication methods). There are no easy solutions to these barriers that are far too common. However, we propose that a consistent pooling of resources, in terms of building on the strengths and talents of multiple stakeholders could be productive. Maurana and Goldenberg (1996) report that based on their academic-community partnership experience, they worked to diversify their funding sources and have complemented their academic institution’s resources with the community’s resources so they are a united team applying for limited grant dollars.

We propose that academic-community partnerships hold great potential for expanding the breadth of public health issues that are able to be addressed at the local level. Public health is a very broad and diverse discipline and such collaborations could focus on matters related to land use management, workforce development, and community revitalization initiatives. However, as one academic respondent mentioned, academic institutions often do not acknowledge this community-based work because of the time needed to produce a peer-reviewed result that may not coincide with the academician’s schedule for academic promotion. Seeing the potential for such academic-community partnerships to improve the quality of life for populations, we recommend that academic institutions need to reconsider the value placed on such work and adjust the promotion schedule for those faculty engaged in academic-community partnerships. Maurana and Goldenberg (1996) report, in their experience, “…a restructured reward system that values professional service and applied research” outside of their academic institution was developed. As the outcomes of such unique and productive partnerships become more visible, we anticipate more academic institutions will adopt a similar approach.

Academic-community partnerships reported several means by which to assess the effectiveness of the partnership itself. Most partners reported several basic measures including the number of attendees at meetings, contributions of partners while at these meetings, extent of information disseminated, etc. We encourage academic-community partnerships to engage in a regular assessment of their partnership in addition to the evaluation that occurs with the established public health intervention the partnership has implemented. We propose that regular evaluation of the partnership itself will allow for adjustments in the operating principles, if necessary, and should contribute to the partnership’s sustainability. The partners should develop an assessment tool for their partnership that is right for them—a “one size fits all” evaluation tool would not be appropriate but general components may include an assessment of the knowledge and utilization of CBPR principles by all involved partners.

Although the findings from this exploratory analysis provide valuable insight into the characterization of academic-community partnerships working on public health issues, several limitations to this work should be noted. The sampling bias associated with a non-probability sampling technique limits the generalizability of the findings from this study to other academic-community partnerships. Missing data occurred randomly across the surveys. In addition, the results were limited by the cross-sectional study design and compliance to the authenticity of self-reported information. Similar to other studies, our work, in many instances, was challenged by collecting data that pertained to the perceptions of individual partners. Despite these limitations, our findings have been appropriately qualified and we propose they provide valuable insight into the development, functioning, and effectiveness of academic-community partnerships that address public health issues.

As academic and community collaborations become increasingly common for addressing challenging public health concerns, we propose that evaluating the effectiveness of academic-community partnerships should include an evaluation of the partnership itself. We argue that the process of partnering is just as important as the public health intervention’s outcome. This partnership evaluation should move beyond the ivory walls and also encompass the community’s benchmarks for success. Furthermore, our findings provide some evidence that using CBPR principles in the partnership may be beneficial, and the results emphasize the need for funding, communication, and flexibility when conducting complex yet rewarding work. Future research should include the empirical evaluation of whether the collaborations themselves are actually having the desired effect on
the public health concerns they were developed to help alleviate.

References


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Appendix A. Academic-Community Partner Survey: Academic Partners

School/Program of Public Health Information
1) To your knowledge, is, or has, your academic institution worked with community partners to address public health issues in your local community?
   - If yes, please continue survey.
   - If no, please explain. ______________?
   (Please discontinue survey.)

2) Are you knowledgeable enough about an academic-community partnership your academic institution has participated in, or is participating in? (We realize that your institution may be involved in numerous partnerships for which you are not involved.)
   - If yes, please continue.
   - If no, we kindly request that you submit the survey to the appropriate colleague at your institution who could complete the survey. Thank you.

3) Please name the school/program of public health for which you are associated:

4) What is your current role/position at this academic institution?

Public Health Issue(s) Addressed
5) Of the primary academic-community partnership for which you are/were involved, what is the main public health issue the partnership sought to address in the community? Please select one.
   a. Childhood lead poisoning
   b. Asthma
   c. Teenage pregnancy
   d. Drug use
   e. Childhood obesity
   f. Safe neighborhoods/violence prevention
   g. Walkable community
   h. Chronic disease (e.g., heart disease, cancer, diabetes)
   i. HIV/AIDS
   j. Sexually transmitted diseases (not including HIV/AIDS)
   k. Refugee resettlement
   l. Oral health
   m. Mental health
   n. Unemployment
   o. Social capital/connectedness
   p. Emergency preparedness
   q. Access to healthy food choices
   r. Access to health care
   s. Healthy indoor school environment
   t. Industry that is contaminating the environment
   u. Other:

6) Please identify the other public health issues that academic-community partnerships at your institution have sought to address? Please check all that apply.
   a. Community coalition
   b. Community advisory board
   c. Council
   d. Citizen activist group
   e. Non-profit organization
   f. Local health department
   g. County health department
   h. Regional health department
   i. State health department
   j. Other municipal department
   k. Other
   l. Other:

Nature/Characteristics of the Academic-Community Partnership
8) What has been/is the role of your school/program of public health in this partnership? Please check all that apply.
   a. Convener of the academic-community partnership
   b. Invited member by the community partner
   c. Other (please describe):

9) Does your academic-community partnership operate by the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)? Please select one.
   a. Yes,
   b. No
   c. I don’t know what CBPR principles are
   d. Other (please describe):

10) What activities did/does your academic-community partnership engage in to address this public health issue? Please check all that apply.
    a. Surveys
    b. Focus groups
    c. Interviews with key informants
    d. Regular school meetings
    e. Newsletters
    f. Media outlets (e.g., local access cable tele-
vision)
g. Work with the legislature  

h. Work with healthcare providers
i. Other (please describe):

11) If conflicts between partners arose, how were they resolved? Please check all that apply.
   a. An independent mediator
   b. Consistent attempts by both partners via face-to-face communication
   c. Dissolution of the partnership
   d. Other (please describe):

12) How is your partnership working to obtain the resources needed to reach its goals? Please check all that apply.
   a. Writing grants to local funding agencies
   b. Writing grants to state funding agencies
   c. Writing grants to federal agencies
   d. Writing grants to private funding foundations/organizations
   e. Fundraising initiatives
   f. Other (please describe):

Effectiveness of Partnership

Strengths/Benefits

13) What have been some of the positive outcomes of your academic-community partnership on public health issues that impact the community? Please check all that apply.
   a. Greater community awareness of the public health issue
   b. Reduction of exposure
   c. Elimination of the public health issue
   d. Funding to continue the work to address the issue
   e. None
   f. Don’t know
   g. Other (please describe):

14) Overall, how beneficial do you think your academic-community partnership is/was perceived by the community in which you worked? Please select one.
   a. Very beneficial
   b. Somewhat beneficial
   c. Not beneficial
   d. Don’t know
   e. Other (please describe):

Weaknesses/Challenges

15) What have been some of the barriers/challenges in establishing community relationships? Please check all that apply.
   a. Building infrastructure (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding, communication methods, standard processes)
   b. Lack of community engagement
   c. Implementing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles
   d. Lack of financial resources
   e. Lack of time for project
   f. Lack of experienced personnel
   g. Other (please describe):

Goal Achievement

16) How effective has your academic-community partnership been (to date) at addressing the main public health issue you identified in Question 5 in your community? Please select one.
   a. Very effective
   b. Somewhat effective
   c. Neither effective nor ineffective
   d. Somewhat ineffective
   e. Very ineffective
   f. Don’t know
   g. Other (please describe):

17) Please describe how you judge/evaluate the effectiveness of your academic-community partnership in addressing the identified public health issue?

18) Based on the measure(s) of effectiveness identified in Question 17, was your academic-community partnership successful in addressing the public health issue in the community? Please select one.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Too early to tell
   d. Other (please describe):

19) Has your academic-community partnership published (or is in the process of writing/submitting) any of the partnership results in a peer reviewed journal? Please select one.
   a. Yes (If yes, please cite the peer-reviewed journal: )
   b. No
   c. Don’t know

20) Has your academic-community partnership published (or is in the process of writing/submitting) any of the partnership results anywhere besides a peer reviewed journal? Please select one.
   a. Yes (If yes, please describe).
   b. No
   c. Don’t know

Future Academic-Community Partnerships

21) Please describe the lessons your academic institution learned (to date) from this academic-community partnership?

22) What, if anything, do you think your academic-community partnership could have done/could do differently to make this partnership more effective? Please check all that apply.
   a. Provide more human resources
   b. Spend more time on project
   c. Provide more financial resources
   d. Nothing
   e. Other (please describe):

23) How likely is it that your academic institution will use an academic-community partnership in the future to address public health issues in your community? Please select one.
   a. Very likely
   b. Somewhat likely
   c. Neither likely nor unlikely
   d. Somewhat unlikely
   e. Very unlikely
f. Don’t know
g. Other (please describe):

24) Overall, would you say that your academic-community partnership: Please select one.
   a. Completely reached its objectives
   b. Met some of its objectives
   c. Didn’t meet any of its objectives
   d. Still in the process of trying to reach objectives
   e. Don’t know
   f. Other (please describe):

25) Is there anything else that you would like to add about the effectiveness of the academic-community partnership for which you have been involved? Please explain.

Appendix B. Academic-Community Partnership Survey: Community Partners

Community Organization Information
1) To your knowledge, is, or has, your community organization worked with academic partners to address public health issues in your local community?
   -If yes, please continue survey.
   -If no, please explain.______________?
   (Please discontinue survey.)

2) Are you knowledgeable enough about an academic-community partnership your community organization has participated in, or is participating in? (We realize that your organization may be involved in numerous partnerships for which you are not involved.)
   -If yes, please continue.
   -If no, we kindly request that you submit the survey to the appropriate colleague at your organization who could complete the survey. Thank you.

3) Please name the community organization for which you are associated:

4) What is your current role/position in this community organization?

Public Health Issue(s) Addressed
5) Of the primary academic-community partnership for which you are/were involved, what is the main public health issue the partnership sought to address in the community? Please select one.
   a. Childhood lead poisoning
   b. Asthma
   c. Teenage pregnancy
   d. Drug use
   e. Childhood obesity
   f. Safe neighborhoods/violence prevention
   g. Walkable community
   h. Chronic disease (e.g., heart disease, cancer, diabetes)
   i. HIV/AIDS
   j. Sexually transmitted diseases (not including HIV/AIDS)
   k. Refugee resettlement
   l. Oral health
   m. Mental health
   n. Unemployment
   o. Social capital/connectedness
   p. Emergency preparedness
   q. Access to healthy food choices
   r. Access to health care
   s. Healthy indoor school environment
   t. Industry that is contaminating the environment
   u. Other:

6) Please identify the other public health issues that academic-community partnerships at your organization have sought to address? Please check all that apply.
   a. Childhood lead poisoning
   b. Asthma
   c. Teenage pregnancy
   d. Drug use
   e. Childhood obesity
   f. Safe neighborhoods/violence prevention
   g. Walkable community
   h. Chronic disease (e.g., heart disease, cancer, diabetes)
   i. HIV/AIDS
   j. Sexually transmitted diseases (not including HIV/AIDS)
   k. Refugee resettlement
   l. Oral health
   m. Mental health
   n. Unemployment
   o. Social capital/connectedness
   p. Emergency preparedness
   q. Access to healthy food choices
   r. Access to health care
   s. Healthy indoor school environment
   t. Industry that is contaminating the environment
   u. Other:

Community Partner Information
7) Please list the kind of academic partners you are/were working with on the main public health issue identified in Question 5. Please check all that apply.
   a. School of public health Please name:
   a. Program of public health Please name:
   b. Department of community health Please name:
   c. Department of environmental health
   d. Department of nursing Please name:
   e. Department of sociology Please name:
   f. Department of social work Please name:
   g. Department of maternal and child health
   h. Business school Please name:
   i. Law school Please name:
   k. Other Please describe and name:

Nature/Characteristics of the Academic-Community Partnership
8) What has been/is the role of your community organization in this partnership? Please check all that apply.
   a. Convener of the academic-community partnership
   b. Invited member by the academic partner
c. Other (please describe):

9) Does your academic-community partnership operate by the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)? Please select one.
   a. Yes,
   b. No
   c. I don't know what CBPR principles are
   d. Other (please describe):

10) What activities did/does your academic-community partnership engage in to address this public health issue? Please check all that apply.
   a. Surveys
   b. Focus groups
   c. Interviews with key informants
   d. Regular school meetings
   e. Newsletters
   f. Media outlets (e.g., local access cable television)
   g. Work with the legislature
   h. Work with healthcare providers
   i. Other (please describe):

11) If conflicts between partners arose, how were they resolved? Please check all that apply.
   a. An independent mediator
   b. Consistent attempts by both partners via face-to-face communication
   c. Dissolution of the partnership
   d. Other (please describe):

12) How is your partnership working to obtain the resources needed to reach its goals? Please check all that apply.
   a. Writing grants to local funding agencies
   b. Writing grants to state funding agencies
   c. Writing grants to federal agencies
   d. Writing grants to private funding foundations/organizations
   e. Fundraising initiatives
   f. Other (please describe):

Effectiveness of Partnership

Strengths/Benefits

13) What have been some of the positive outcomes of your academic-community partnership on public health issues that impact the community? Please check all that apply.
   a. Greater community awareness of the public health issue
   b. Reduction of exposure
   c. Elimination of the public health issue
   d. Funding to continue the work to address the issue
   e. None
   f. Don't know
   g. Other (please describe):

14) Overall, how beneficial do you think your academic-community partnership is/was perceived by the community in which you worked? Please select one.
   a. Very beneficial
   b. Somewhat beneficial
   c. Not beneficial
   d. Don't know
   e. Other (please describe):

Weaknesses/Challenges

15) What have been some of the barriers/challenges in establishing relationships with academic partners? Please check all that apply.
   a. Building infrastructure (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding, communication methods, standard processes)
   b. Lack of community engagement
   c. Implementing Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles
   d. Lack of financial resources
   e. Lack of time for project
   f. Lack of experienced personnel
   g. Other (please describe):

Goal Achievement

16) How effective has your academic-community partnership been, to date, at addressing the main public health issue you identified in Question 5 in your community? Please select one.
   a. Very effective
   b. Somewhat effective
   c. Neither effective nor ineffective
   d. Somewhat ineffective
   e. Very ineffective
   f. Don't know
   g. Other (please describe):

17) Please describe how you judge/evaluate the effectiveness of your academic-community partnership in addressing the identified public health issue?

18) Based on the measure(s) of effectiveness identified in Question 17, was your academic-community partnership successful in addressing the public health issue in the community? Please select one.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Too early to tell
   d. Other (please describe):

19) Has your academic-community partnership published (or is in the process of writing/submitting) any of the partnership results in a peer reviewed journal? Please select one.
   a. Yes (If yes, please cite the peer-reviewed journal: )
   b. No
   c. Don't know

20) Has your academic-community partnership published (or is in the process of writing/submitting) any of the partnership results anywhere besides a peer reviewed journal? Please select one.
   a. Yes (If yes, please describe).
   b. No
   c. Don't know

Future Academic-Community Partnerships

21) Please describe the lessons your community organization learned (to date) from this academic-community partnership?

22) What, if anything, do you think your academic-community partnership could have done/could do differently to make this partnership more effective? Please check all that apply.
   a. Provide more human resources
b. Spend more time on project  
c. Provide more financial resources  
d. Nothing  
e. Other (please describe):

23) How likely is it that your community organization will use an academic-community partnership in the future to address public health issues in your community? Please select one.  
a. Very likely  
b. Somewhat likely  
c. Neither likely nor unlikely  
d. Somewhat unlikely  
e. Very unlikely  
f. Don’t know  
g. Other (please describe):

24) Overall, would you say that your academic-community partnership: Please select one.  
a. Completely reached its objectives  
b. Met some of its objectives  
c. Didn’t meet any of its objectives  
d. Still in the process of trying to reach objectives  
e. Don’t know  
f. Other (please describe):

25) Is there anything else that you would like to add about the effectiveness of the academic-community partnership for which you have been involved? Please explain.
Appalachian Ohio is a unique community with a rich history, which presents both strengths and challenges for community engagement initiatives. This paper describes a service-learning project that offered cultural diversity training to professionals in Appalachia as a foundational component of a social work program focus on community engagement. Service learning in social work classrooms has been examined for many years (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Lemieux & Allen, 2007; Lowe & Clark, 2009; Mink & Twill, 2012; Mitschke & Petrovich, 2011). By definition, many service-learning projects necessarily involve community engagement.

Integral to this paper is the definition of community engagement. The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification defined community engagement as “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” (Campus Compact, 2015, para. 4). Community engagement involves students spending time in their larger communities, with the broad goal of both learning and having a positive impact.

Texas Tech University defined service learning as “a pedagogy that links academic study and civic engagement through thoughtfully organized service that meets the needs of the community” (Lowe & Clark, 2009; Texas Tech University, 2002, para. 2). Service learning, an active form of community engagement, can be used in the social work classroom in a variety of ways, including in the promotion of hands-on experience within the safe context of academic supervision.

Primarily, the literature in the area of service learning reflects instructor analyses of student projects in bachelor of social work classrooms (Lowe & Clark, 2009; Mink & Twill, 2012). However, there is limited literature available regarding the experiences of a Master of Social Work (MSW) student, from the student’s perspective. This article seeks to share an MSW student’s perspective regarding a service-learning project conducted in an agency in Appalachian Ohio, as well as describe the impact to the overall community.

I work as a guardian ad litem (GAL) for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Clermont Kids (CASA), in Clermont County, Ohio Juvenile Court. I have worked with the abuse, neglect, and dependency docket in that court since February of 2011. This work with families in difficult situations is extremely rewarding. In order to serve as a GAL, I was required to attend a 40-hour training. In addition, I am required to complete 12 hours of continuing education each calendar year. I am also currently a MSW graduate student in Kentucky.

Upon entering a graduate level social work class in multiculturalism, I learned that service-learning projects would comprise one of our focus areas for the course. Furthermore, each student would be allowed to pick an agency with which to work. One of the ways in which social workers can expand their cultural competence is to learn about their own culture and the experiences of others in that culture (Clay, 2010). Therefore, I chose to complete my project by expanding my knowledge of the culture of poverty experienced by Appalachian people. This community experiences poverty at a rate of 111.5% of the poverty rate of the United States overall (Appalachian Regional Commission [3], n.d.).
The broad focus of my project was a Culture of Poverty and Appalachian Cultural History training class that I developed and taught for other GALs at CASA. The purpose of this class was to provide an in-depth look at the population served by GALs in that area, the Appalachian community. This paper discusses the project completed, and advocates for the implementation of service learning as an effective means of community engagement in graduate social work classrooms.

CASA is an organization of community volunteers that advocate for the best interests of children in the foster care system (CASA for Clermont Kids, 2015; Royalty, 2014). The concept behind CASA came about in response to children “slipping through the cracks” of the legal system (Royalty, 2014). In many instances, “slipping through the cracks” indicates that a child’s case has not received proper attention, and that child may be at increased risk as a result. GALs in Ohio are appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interests of a child by making recommendations to the court in the form of a written report (CASA for Clermont Kids, 2015). The major advantage of having a CASA GAL appointed on a case is the more individualized attention the CASA volunteer can provide to each case, as they typically only work on one to two cases at any time.

This branch of CASA works exclusively in an Appalachian county, but does not always have workers who may identify as Appalachian (Royalty, 2014). Clermont County, Ohio serves as the most western border of Appalachia in Ohio (Appalachian Regional Commission [1], n.d.). In 2010, Clermont County had a population of 197,363 with a per capita income of $34,786 (Appalachian Regional Commission [2], n.d.). For 2010, the unemployment rate in Clermont County was 9.7%, with 18,790 people living below the U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2007–2011. This indicates that, in 2010, Clermont County had a poverty rate of 9.6% (Appalachian Regional Commission [2], n.d.).

CASA for Clermont Kids served 232 children in 2013 (Royalty, 2014), all of them from Clermont County. While many of the clients served by CASA are among those included in the lowest income families in the county, many of the GALs come from more middle class or upper middle class backgrounds (Royalty, 2014). This creates an obvious disconnect between the experiences of the families served and those serving them. For this reason, it was determined that a community need would be filled by educating GALs about the culture of poverty and Appalachian culture and history.

For my project, rather than risk the possibility of revealing confidential information regarding real clients, I made the decision to use a case example from the popular documentary “The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia” Video excerpts from the documentary were used in the training class. One of the people featured was Susan White, who discovered she was pregnant after stabbing her boyfriend with a knife. Susan had a problem with prescription painkillers, and the baby also subsequently tested positive for painkillers at birth. The documentary shows Susan crushing and snorting pills in the hospital prior to her release after childbirth. Local authorities were notified, and the child was placed in the custody of the local children services agency (Taylor & Nitzberg, 2010).

I chose to use this example because an overwhelming majority of the cases in which CASA becomes involved have an element of substance abuse listed as the primary reason for the removal of the child. Clermont County is currently experiencing an epidemic of heroin abuse. From January through June 2014, 68 children were removed from their homes and placed in the custody of Clermont County Children’s Services. Of those, 47% of the cases were related to substance abuse (Royalty, 2014). Every case that I have handled in my time with CASA has been either directly or indirectly related to substance abuse in some way.

After choosing the video excerpts, I began building a PowerPoint presentation that included a general discussion of poverty, situational versus generational poverty, and a brief history of the exploitation of Appalachian populations and the prevalence of negative Appalachian stereotypes in popular media. I then related all of this information back to the ways in which GALs can support Appalachian families to promote the reunification of the family following a child’s removal from the home.

A fundamental tenet of service learning is that it should be mutually beneficial, with “…two main goals- enhancing student learning and civic responsibility while also providing a benefit to the local target community” (Mitschke & Petrovich, 2011, p. 97). In concurrence with this standard, this project was both beneficial to the community as well as myself. Nine practicing GALs participated in this training, which equals roughly 20% of the CASA GALs in the county at that time. Those who attended the training class completed a survey based on their experiences, and reported that they felt more comfortable working with a population with which they were previously unfamiliar. This
is a benefit to the local target community, as the professionals gained knowledge of the population with which they work.

As for the impact on me as a student, I learned how valuable it can be to share information in a formal agency setting. I was excited and honored to be able to share a topic I am passionate about with a group of individuals whose primary goal is to improve outcomes for children in our county. I have been able to see the long-term effects of this training in questions from participants that I have received since the training. Being able to get out in the community and impact a population that holds a special place in my heart allowed me to see the struggles Appalachian populations must face in working with people who do not understand their culture. It was a very enlightening experience that I may not have had without the opportunity this project afforded me to become further engaged in the community in such a deep way.

Looking back on my experiences with this class project, there are several things I would change for a future project. Because we were allowed so much freedom in picking our projects and agencies, it would have been nice to have one semester’s worth of advanced notice of the project. That would have allowed students to really think about the projects they would like to complete, and if not already affiliated with an agency, to identify and partner with an agency that appeals to the student’s area of interest. One semester to partner with an agency, get a project approved, and complete the actual project seemed a bit rushed.

Additionally, this project assignment would have been more beneficial to the target population of children and families if more CASA GALs had attended, and if this training class had been offered to all guardians working in Clermont County. Participants were offered the opportunity of earning three credit hours toward their yearly-required 12 hours. However some other type of incentive, such as a drawing for a gift card or books, may have made a difference in the attendance numbers, thereby potentially making a larger impact on the community.

Following my experience with this project, I decided that more work needed to be done with regard to the impact of the training class. Because “service learning in social work education is a pedagogical approach in need of more rigorous evaluation research to advance knowledge and to inform practice in the field” (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, p. 321), I approached my advanced research professor as well as the professor who assigned the original service-learning project about conducting a study on the overall effectiveness of the training. They both agreed to further develop and evaluate this project, and the continued project is an ongoing effort.

After completing this project, I feel that the impact of service-learning projects on both MSW students and the larger community is greatly beneficial. Organizations have the ability to benefit from a knowledge base they may not otherwise be able to access. Furthermore, it allows students to work on a project and immediately see the benefit in real-life situations. Because both of these combine to help create stronger communities and more civic-minded professionals, I feel that service-learning projects that incorporate a strong community engagement emphasis should be part of the educational experiences of MSW students across the country.

References


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**About the Author**

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Jane Newman, Ph.D.
Book Review Editor
The Story behind the Stories in Community-Based Digital Media Projects

Reviewed by Alan Davis


Suppose you are skilled in using digital media to tell stories, and want to work with members of a community to equip them to use digital media to tell their own individual and collective stories. You believe that the activity will be empowering, even transformative for the participants and possibly for the larger community, and armed with that conviction you obtain funding from a foundation. But in carrying out your project for the first time, issues arise that had never entered your mind when you wrote your proposal. You consider yourself a member of the community you are facilitating, but some participants are wary of you and think of you as an outsider. You hope to be able to showcase the products of your project for future funders, but participants want to tell stories that funders may find offensive. Community leaders have signed letters of support, but now seem to be changing their minds or reneging on promises. You have worked on building trust and encouraging authenticity and disclosure in your participants, but disclosures by some are interpreted by others as putting the community at risk of censure or attack. In preparing your project, you’d read lots of books and articles, but you wonder why none of them had focused on the very issues that you now find yourself focusing on from week to week.

Community-Based Multiliteracies & Digital Media Projects explores the complex issues that can and do arise when members of communities, especially vulnerable communities, come together with the support of expert facilitators to author and share stories using media. Each chapter is authored by facilitators with extensive experience with such projects. Chapters are grounded in a rich range of contexts; a partial list includes Aboriginal Canadian youth creating a video game; personal digital stories by queer and trans persons, youth in foster care, and patients in medical facilities; male African American youth participating in a documentary film; immigrant youth participating in a photo-voice project; and a village in Ghana hosting a talk radio program. The editors identify four main “tensions” explored across these contexts: managing the integrity of process and product, maintaining communication, thinking critically about impact, and sustaining the work.

This is not a book about theory, but editors Pleasants and Salter provide an insightful exploration of the conceptual relationship between community and multiliteracies in the introductory chapter. They trace the term multiliteracies to the New London Group (1996), scholars who emphasized the need of educators to recognize the pedagogical implications of the shift from print-based text to screen-based communication and global shifts in community lives. They draw also on Heath’s (1983) cultural linguistic documentation of how distinct communities may engage in distinctive forms of expression and interpretation even when all speak English as their first language and have attended school in the same region. Literacies are more than skills divorced from communities. They are, as the authors state, practices that are always mediated by the interplay between local and global social interactions, cultures, assigned meanings and values of communities.

Although Pleasants and Salter don’t mention it, Heath (1983) went on to argue that tensions quickly arise when a teacher from one literacy community seeks to impose literacy practices on children from a community embracing different “ways with words.” In some of the stories in this book we see similar tensions at work. One example is the chapter by Lewis and Fragnito describing a project in which Aboriginal youth wanted to create a video game called Grand Theft Rez, when funders and facilitators had something less larcenous in mind. Another successful resolution is explored by Rob Simon et al. in their “Teaching to Learn Project” in which teenagers and beginning teachers in Toronto read and discussed young adult fiction together outside of a school setting, positioning the teenagers as experts on teen culture and experience. The description of their shared experience contrasts with many bleak efforts I have witnessed in which White middle class teachers tried unsuccessfully to engage teenagers of color in discussing literature.
Several chapters touch upon complex ethical issues of ownership and disclosure regarding personal narratives. Amy Hill, in her chapter “Digital Storytelling and the Politics of Doing Good,” does a particularly sensitive and insightful job of exploring the ethics sharing personal narratives. She uses case studies to describe her shift from a position of wanting to “surface rarely heard stories in the service of justice,” a stance she now describes as naïve, to a much more cautionary stance governed by clearly articulated principles. In her examples, a teenager from California creates a digital story about his former life as a gang member and wants to include photos of his friends. Women in Nepal, a country with a very high incidence of violence against women and a stigma against women who have suffered sexual abuse, create digital stories about experiences of sexual violence which could have severely negative consequences for them if viewed by outsiders. At a digital storytelling workshop in South Africa for women with HIV/AIDS, one woman felt betrayed when her digital story was shared with members of the organization’s staff who hadn’t been present when she first created it. The examples highlight the complexity of safeguarding storytellers from their own desire to reveal information that can put them or others at risk, the difficulty in communicating information in advance about who might view a story, the impossibility of knowing in advance how some people will respond to one’s story, and matters of ownership when a participant agrees to share her story and later changes her mind.

“Impact” is one of the four tensions identified by the authors to be dealt with in this book, and they place it in quotation marks as I have here, perhaps to convey a slightly ironic tone. In my opinion, it is the topic least persuasively dealt with. Digital media production is a huge commercial enterprise, from Hollywood to YouTube, and students pay tuition to take courses in film and multi-media production, in part because they want to use the skills commercially. Here, however, we are talking about activities funded mainly by government grants and charitable giving via non-profit organizations, and funders want to know how the activities they support benefit the participants. For those facilitating the projects, this is often a tension: The funder expects certain proposed outcomes, and the effort to achieve those may impinge on the process in artificial and negative ways. For many facilitators, the value of the effort seems self-evident from their daily experience. Diana Nucera, co-director with Jenny Lee of the Allied Media Projects in Detroit, eloquently describes her own experience of personal transformation and the role of mediated self-expression in that transformation, and uses her personal experience as a means of facilitating transformative experiences in others. I was moved by her personal account, and at the same time I wanted a more systematic account of how facilitators approach the problem of evaluation and documentation, and how participants are impacted by the projects described in her chapter and in other chapters. Certainly this is a topic for a different book, but it wasn’t addressed as carefully as the other themes in this one. However, this is a minor criticism of this much-needed sharing of personal experiences in the facilitation of community-based multiliteracy and digital media projects.

References

About the Reviewer
Alan Davis is an associate professor of Urban Ecologies and Research Methodology in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver.
In a refreshing approach and practical guide to innovative research methods, Dr. Sonya Atalay demonstrates the richness of community-engaged research for research, for scientists, and for communities. In Community-Based Archaeology, Atalay persuades readers that through active engagement in the research practice, community members — and not scientists — provide the most effective research guidance. Such practice overturns assumptions about the necessity of detached research and ultimately promotes better research and community well-being by embracing local people, traditions, and knowledge. Atalay’s enthusiasm for inclusive knowledge production provides readers and researchers with a book that is tightly focused on the meaning and applications of community-based participatory research (CBPR) while promoting decolonizing “research with, by, and for indigenous communities” (subtitle).

This review begins with a presentation of Atalay’s professional interests. Then it will provide a brief presentation of the central arguments of the book, followed by evidence supporting her assertions. Next the review will explore the organization and structure of the book in the context of its major themes, followed by a short evaluation and critique. Finally the review will situate Atalay’s book within the literature, followed by a short conclusion.

Dr. Atalay is an associate professor at the University of Massachusetts with research interests and a growing experiential base in the area of engaged (public) anthropology. She was educated at the University of Michigan and the University of California-Berkeley. Atalay has been awarded significant research funds and positions in support of the development of community-based research, which is outlined extensively in this book. Atalay’s current research is conducted in full partnership with indigenous and local communities, and her university classes are practical opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to gain hands-on experience in how to partner with communities to identify research needs. Atalay crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries to incorporate aspects of cultural anthropology, archaeology, heritage studies, and indigenous studies, a perspective reflected and supported in the book. Atalay’s writing, teaching, and community-based research reflect her conviction that research is best when ordinary people are engaged in the work of studying, protecting, and teaching about their own cultural heritage, and that these benefits extend positively beyond the limited timelines and parameters of traditional archaeological research.

The central argument of Community-Based Archaeology is that local people engaged in research about their histories and culture produce, ethical, relevant, and sustainable research. Furthermore, for indigenous populations and especially for archaeological research among indigenous populations, the work is particularly meaningful because the community members determine the research agenda. This is an interesting assertion and, according to the book, works well. There are five case studies within the book that demonstrate how CBPR is enacted throughout each stage of the research process. While each chapter provides theoretical frameworks, the chapters focus on practical examples from Atalay’s own research regarding how to build inclusive relationships, how to collaborate with members of the community, and how to share research results with that community.

The first chapter merges indigenous principles with community-engagement principles to argue convincingly that the time has come for a sustainable archaeology through community-based research. The following chapters explore the origins of community-based research, the guiding principles of CBPR, and then how community research partners are connected. These lead logically to the fourth chapter, and the rest of the book, which is a presentation of the practical aspects of research, identifying research questions, developing a research design, gathering data, and sharing results. Atalay is mindful of the lasting effects of research,
and encourages her readers, especially academic researchers, to do the same.

The case studies help readers understand how Atalay’s thesis can work in multiple settings. Each case study is presented to demonstrate that CBPR is more than theory: It is a tested practice. The book also provides a solid “how-to” manual for researchers looking to conduct meaningful research, particularly with indigenous people. What is perhaps most compelling is Atalay’s consistent assertion that commitment to the principles of community-based research will develop a long-lasting and productive research relationship with a community.

The book is presented in a readable format in eight chapters. Each chapter is appropriately titled to make engagement with the book simpler for readers. For those seeking the more practical aspects of CBPR, chapter titles like “Identifying Research Questions” and “Gathering Data and Sharing Results” make navigating the book quite straightforward. The index is particularly helpful as the book is a dense 312 pages. The central focus of the book is clearly supported by the principles of community-based participatory research. There are five interrelated and overlapping principles for archaeological CBPR presented in the book that have emerged out of Atalay’s own experiences planning and conducting five CBPR projects: 1) a community-based partnership process; 2) an aspiration to be participatory in all aspects; 3) the building of community capacity; 4) a spirit of reciprocity; and 5) reorganized contributions of multiple knowledge systems. Atalay is clear that although these five principles interrelate and overlap, each plays a critical and identifiable role in making the CBPR project successful.

The book brings the research process to life, which is particularly compelling in a “how to” manual for archaeology. The book stresses that community members, not scientists, are in charge of their cultural heritage and it is the strength of community, not merely artifacts, that embody and translate culture across time. Atalay’s thesis is well-placed and supported, proving that archaeological research can be relevant, exciting, community-based, and decolonized.

This is an important book that joins the expanding literature challenging the traditional confines of academic research to acknowledge indigenous research principles. Atalay’s theme, also proclaimed by indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhawai-Smithwith’s Decolonizing Methodologies (1996), Shawn Wilson with Research is Ceremony (2008), and Kathleen Absolon with Kaandissiwewin: How We Come to Know (2011), is captured in her subtitle: “Research with, by, and for Indigenous and local communities.” Readers are not just exposed to Atalay’s thesis; she supports her work in each chapter with theory, research, and practical application. The book joins the emerging body of literature that connects North American indigenous research principles with academic research toward a “trail that leads to a future of lasting peace” (p. ix). Atalay states clearly that “the next generation of archaeologists will be quite different from those of past decades, and as a result, archaeology students must master new types of skills and training” (p. 1). The book is persuasive in its comprehensive assertion that engaged, ethical, and sustainable research is best when it collaborates with descendant and local communities to build an exciting future of possibilities and relevance for archaeology. However, in the sometimes rigid world of academia, and in particular the tightly competitive parameters of funding, it may be a long while before community-based archaeology is fully embraced. In the meantime, the book should appeal to scholars truly interested in expanding their views and their practices of research. One assumes that with the depth of engagement that undergirds CBPR, Atalay considers the price tag of this kind of research secondary to its meaningfulness. The monetary and personnel cost of relevant research continues to be a challenge for universities, but this dimension of CBPR is not addressed in the book.

One completes the book with a thorough exposure to the multiple facets, actual practices, and the potential of community-based research for archaeology, and for other disciplines that may not have traditionally embraced such principles. The field of systematic inquiry is in a time of significant change and Atalay’s book is unique in the way it brings emancipation from colonizing methods to archaeological research, standing among other pioneers in academic research that provide empirical evidence for indigenous and community-engaged research.

In conclusion, the book is an excellent resource for those seeking tools and a philosophical framework for an exciting and plausible research vehicle that is emerging in indigenous research paradigms in particular. Without doubt, Atalay’s book is essential reading for those who seek excellence in research and who seek to construct meaningful, inclusive, and community-based and community engaged research. This book should prove useful for both qualitative and quantitative
research courses and their instructors, especially for those committed to research that makes a difference within and with the larger community.

References


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