Old and Young Dogs Teaching Each Other Tricks: The Importance of Developing Agency for Community Partners in Community Learning

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Abstract

This article covers the importance of creating and developing agency in community partners when engaging in community-based learning. Often when faculty incorporate service- or community-based learning into their classes, we measure the "learning" part but not the "service" or "community." Focusing more on the latter involves working "with" community partners instead of working "for" community partners, and this focus creates a more effective experience for all stakeholders involved. Achieving this goal of working "with" partners not only requires collaboration but also requires an effort to create and develop a sense of agency among the community partners. In the current teaching note, collaborative projects between undergraduate sociology classes and a local senior center are discussed. These projects show enhanced learning for the college students as well as an enhanced experience for community partners due to the emphasis on establishing and nurturing agency among community partners.

Keywords

community-based learning, service-learning, aging

Typically when faculty engage their students in service- or community-based learning they have three primary goals (Breunig 2005; Lashley 2007); first is to provide the students with a hands-on learning experience that will allow the students to apply course material to "real world" settings. The second goal is to provide the students with an opportunity for personal growth through introspective processing of the experiences. Finally, faculty hope that the work the students do will have a positive impact on the community, or on the population with which the students are working. Much has been written on the first two goals mentioned (Berman 2006; Blouin and Perry 2009; Breunig 2005; Ives and Obenchain 2006; Lashley 2007; Markus, Howard, and King 1993; Mooney and

Edwards 2001; Nystrand 1997; Pompa 2002; Tynjala 1998; Wright 2000); however, the third goal regarding the effect on community partners is often overlooked—both by faculty and in pedagogical discourse.

The third goal is often accomplished through volunteer/charity work. For example, I teach a Social Inequality class that requires students to serve food at a homeless shelter. This project

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always succeeds in achieving the first two peda-
gogical goals of service-learning, but I am left
wondering how much of an impact the project has
on the homeless in our area. The service itself is
practically good, but the question remains whether
or not projects such as this are more exploitive
than collaborative and whether or not this project
and others could be more effective in achieving
that third goal through more collaboration. I posit
that it is not merely collaborating with community
partners that leads to more effectiveness, but that
focusing on developing agency—the capability
and ability of an individual to act on his or her
will—among those partners will also enhance all
three goals.

The first section of this article offers an over-
view of community-based learning, with an
emphasis on community-based learning involving
collaboration and the elderly. The second section
describes two specific community-based learning
projects with a local senior center. The third sec-
tion provides qualitative results from all partici-
pants, articulating the effectiveness and importance
of developing agency. For the purposes of this
article, agency is defined as having purpose,
responsibility, control, and voice throughout the
learning process.

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Service-learning

Service-learning pedagogy involves connecting
academic theory and concepts to community ser-
vice efforts and to important social issues (Blouin
and Perry 2009). Service-learning also allows stu-
dents to grow personally in terms of maturity and
character, in addition to growing intellectually
(Berman 2006). The pedagogy provides students
with an opportunity to interact directly with popu-
lations they are studying and to have a hand in
effecting change in the community.

According to Berman (2006) and Wright
(2000), because service-learning is inherently
about community needs, effective service-learning
involves aligning the goals of the course with the
goals of community partners. Ideally, service-
learning achieves mutuality, where the interactions

and projects hold benefits for all stakeholders. Not
all service-learning accomplishes this goal, and
focusing on agency will help to achieve mutuality.

Berman (2006) stresses the importance of
involving students in creative activities that facili-
tate reflection. Many (Ives and Obenchain 2006;
Markus et al. 1993; Mooney and Edwards 2001;
Nystrand 1997; Pompa 2002; Tynjala 1998) have
argued that critical reflection is the most effective
approach to achieving Berman's (2006) objective.
Critical reflection attempts to go beyond the stu-
dent experience itself and to cultivate intellectual
and personal growth through deep introspection
and applying course material to their experiences.

The concern with using service-learning peda-
gogy, and often the major critique of this approach,
is the difficulty in assessing the achievement of the
aforementioned benefits (Markus et al. 1993;
Simons and Cleary 2005; Wright 2000). Another
concern, and the primary one of this article, is the
tendency for service-learning projects to appear as
charity and volunteerism, as opposed to collabora-
tion where mutuality is achieved between students
and community partners (Lewis 2004). This focus
on mutuality distinguishes community-based
learning from traditional service-learning and pro-
vides a key element for the approach discussed in
this article.

Community-based Learning, Action Research, and Collaboration

A shift in traditional service-learning involves
expanding beyond "service" work into "community-
based" interactions. As Wade (1997) argues,
traditional service-learning (especially related to
inequality) may actually widen the distance between
student and community by highlighting the bound-
aries between the two. There is a clear role of "server"
(student) and "served" (community partner), and this
leads to a power structure within the interaction. This
phenomenon then makes service-learning somewhat
hypocritical and self-serving for the students and
creates problems in achieving the desired goals of
this type of learning.

Related to this difference in approach for
community-based learning is participatory action
research. Action research is an approach for work-
ing with organizations and institutions that focuses

on people's understanding of a specific situation in order to resolve the problems that confront them. More specifically, action research uses local, action-oriented efforts to address specific problems in specific situations (Berg 2004). Compared to other forms of community interaction, the researcher works within the community as opposed to working as an objective observer or an external consultant (Ferrance 2000). Approaching community members as equal partners for research is similar to the approach of community-based learning.

According to Rosenberger (2000), mutuality is the key distinction between service- and community-based learning. Mutuality is dependent on each stakeholder having a voice in the decision-making processes as well as the outcomes of the project (Boyle-Baise and Sleeter 2000; Rosenberger 2000). McPherson (1989) suggested that involving community partners early on in deciding the focus and structure of the project is vital for establishing mutuality. This involvement leads to increased engagement from the community partner and enhanced student learning and personal development. Focusing on the increased engagement, Mehra (2004) argues that collaboration leads to empowerment when all participants in the collaboration, and all their work, is equally valued. I believe that valuing work and input from community members does not maximize the benefits of collaboration. Emphasizing the role of agency through involving community members in the learning process will further increase the benefits of community-based learning.

Community-based Learning with Older Community Members

Service-learning is often used in classes that deal with traditional forms of inequality and has been shown to be especially successful in the field of aging. Multiple studies have found that service-learning in aging achieves the initial goals of service-learning: to enhance comprehension of course material (Altpeter and Marshall 2003; Bringle and Hatcher 1996; Cummings and Galambos 2002; Gorelik et al. 2000; Kane 2004; Mason and Sanders 2004) and to increase personal growth (Angiullo and Whitbourne 1996; Bentley and Ellison 2005; Dorfman et al. 2002; Harris and

Dollinger 2001; Hegeman et al. 2002). However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the third goal of service-learning: community benefits.

THE PROJECT

In order to work on developing agency in community partners I developed projects for my Sociology of the Life Course and my Sociology of Family courses. Both projects involved a community-based learning requirement where students were paired with "senior" partners—participants from a local senior center. The inspiration for the projects came from my involvement in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.

As described by Pompa and Crabbe (2004), the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program was piloted in the fall of 1997, a partnership between Temple University and the Philadelphia Prison System. The program involves teaching college-level courses inside prison walls, with the student population comprised of both college students (Outside) and incarcerated individuals (Inside). The unique learning opportunity puts a "face" on the issue of criminal justice and provides students a deeper and more real understanding of the criminal justice system. However, the program is not just about enhancing the discussion on crime and justice; at the heart of the program is a desire to create a sense of mutuality and empowerment.

This mutuality and empowerment is achieved by having the "inside" students participate in all aspects of the class. The half of the class who are incarcerated do the same readings, participate in the same discussions, and write the same papers as the half of the class who are traditional college students. The mutuality created by shared expectations and requirements and the empowerment created by active involvement takes the community partner from being some*thing* that is "other," something that the college students look "at" and do things "to," to some*one* who is a part of the class, some*one* with whom the college students do and work.

Seeing this empowerment firsthand changed the way I thought about community-based learning. It certainly must be noted that the nature of the community partners for Inside-Out (incarcerated individuals) allows for an opportunity to develop

agency given the fact that their situation (incarceration) inherently denies them agency. Still, witnessing how developing agency changed the experience for the community partners, and consequently how that change led to a change in the experience for the college students, I began to think about ways to develop agency in other community-based learning projects.

Classes

I teach at a small liberal arts university, and the students enrolled for the elective classes in question have all completed at least six hours of sociology courses. Most students live on campus and are involved in a variety of campus activities. The classes discussed in this report had 14 and 19 students enrolled.

I originally set out to replicate the Inside-Out experience in my Sociology of the Life Course class by replacing incarcerated individuals with older members of the community—essentially having a class comprised of both college students and older community members. After realizing various logistical and other problems, I decided an exact replication would not be the most effective approach for this project. Instead, I focused on how Inside-Out is effective by engaging the community partners in the learning process—doing "with" as opposed to doing "for" partners. I developed a project where students would be required to partner with a participant from a local senior center to discuss class content, discuss a book that both parties would read, and collaborate on a final project.

Community Partner

My first approach was to partner with a nursing home or assisted-living organization due to access to the desired population. Originally I had established a partnership with a local assisted-living organization, yet with a week before the start of the semester, I learned that we were unable to secure any participants. Being forced to adjust, I was able to establish a partnership with the county senior center (nonresidential), and this proved to a very fortunate second choice. The community partner ended up being strong because of the administrative assistance and because of the population itself.

The senior center serves an estimated 1,800 members of the county who are over the age of 60. The county itself has a population of 111,000 people—with roughly 11,000 over the age of 60. For the first class there were 8 community partners and 13 partners for the second class. The senior center offers programs and advertises other programs so that local seniors are aware of opportunities. The population therefore is a more active and flexible group compared to those in a nursing home or assisted-living organization. Ultimately this proved extremely beneficial to the project in that the community partners were interested (voluntary participation) and able to fully interact with the requirements of the projects (meeting with students, doing the readings, writing the essay).

Overview of Project

As discussed earlier, the common goals for community-based learning are to enhance the learning of students, provide them an opportunity for personal growth, and to do something positive for the community partner. The project for my Sociology of the Life Course class sought to enhance learning for my students by having them discuss course content with someone who has lived the content and to promote personal growth through prosocial interaction with another population. Finally the project sought to create a worthwhile experience for the community partner by engaging the senior partners in the learning process and developing agency among participants by providing responsibility and individuality throughout the experience. These projects were graded based on the quality of the writing and the ability of the partners to integrate and apply material from the course and the text(s) covered in their discussions.

Students were required to meet with their senior partner for a minimum of 10 hours during the course of the semester. During these meetings, partners were tasked with discussing course material and discussing the book *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women* (Allison, Gediman, and Terkel 2007). Finally partners were required to collaborate and create their own "This I Believe" essay. We ended the semester with a final ceremony where all students were provided with a collection of the essays

and during which each individual was able to speak about his or her experience with the project. Excerpts from the specific requirements of the project are provided in the following.[1]

> You will be paired with a participant from the County Senior Center and will work together throughout this semester. There are 7 one-hour meetings built into the course calendar and you will be required to schedule **3 additional hours** with your partner.

> 1. You and your partner will each be reading *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*. This book is a collection of essays from various men and women about what they have learned in life. Periodically throughout the semester you and your partner will meet to discuss particular chapters in this book.
> 2. In addition to discussing the book, you and your partner will discuss some of the concepts and issues we have covered in class. You are to prepare discussion questions and talking points based on the book and course material for each meeting.
> 3. Towards the end of the semester you and your partner will write your own *This I Believe* essay. Together you will take what you have learned and combined with you and your partner's experiences and beliefs compose an essay similar to those in the book.
> 4. You will write a minimum 10 page final paper that will be a reflection of your learning. This will require you to discuss your experiences and interactions with your partner, and more importantly to apply what you learned in the class to those experiences and interactions.
> 5. Requirements for your community-based learning include the following: Expectations Paper, Discussion Questions for each meeting, Summaries of Discussions, Essay, and Final Paper.

With the success of the project in Sociology of the Life Course, I started to think about other courses in which I could further this partnership with the senior center. The next opportunity came when I offered our Sociology of the Family course.

The project in Sociology of the Life Course was a natural fit given the course content and our community partners; students could discuss aging and things that happen over the life course with people who are older and who have experienced more of a life course.

Family also seemed to be a natural fit given that much of the course content is foreign to traditional students aged 18 to 22 years. Most students have experienced dating firsthand, but most have never experienced things like marriage, parenting, divorce, family crisis, and so on, or have only experienced them from the perspective of a child. Therefore, I partnered with the senior center for another community-based learning project with the idea that students would learn more about the sociology of the family and our community partners would have a valuable experience through interactions that facilitated agency.

The project for Sociology of the Family was modeled after the one for the Sociology of the Life Course. The same basic requirements for meetings and discussion questions were employed, the only difference being the final component. I offered partners a choice of final projects with the rationale that offering choices is one way to create agency. In both options the partners would work together to produce something that shows the knowledge gained from texts and experiences. The requirements for the Sociology of the Family project are similar to the Sociology of Life Course project with a few exceptions. First, students were to schedule all 10 hours of contact time on their own. Second, the book the partners read was *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Stein 2008). Finally, the final collaboration was changed in that students had the option of developing a "Family Handbook" or they could conduct oral histories of each other.

As may be evident, rigor is achieved for the college students in both projects through having them develop discussion questions based on course material, compose the essay/interview/handbook with their partner, and finally through a critical reflection paper applying course content to their experiences with their partners. What is not obvious in the project requirements is the role that creating agency played in enhancing the learning experience for the students as well as enhancing the overall experience for the community partners.

Emphasis on Agency

The term *agency* has been used throughout this article and previously defined as the capability and ability of an individual to act on his or her will. Furthermore I view agency as having purpose, responsibility, control, and voice; and to achieve this I focus on active participation and production. I use the term *agency* as a contrast to what I consider a sometimes exploitive approach to community-based learning. Often the community partner is a generalized group, with members holding a status relevant to the course material. Individuality is lost, and the community partners take a passive role in the project as the students are tasked with doing something "to" or "for" the partners, not "with" the partners. My approach for these projects addresses three areas that establish and nurture agency in the community partners. It is the emphasis on these three areas that I think complements action research and community-based learning and offers an effective alternative to traditional service-learning.

Purpose and Responsibility

For the first class, I met with community participants prior to the semester in order to brief them thoroughly on the project and its requirements. I went over the general scope of the project as well as the expectations. Admittedly, telling the community members what the project was going to involve certainly does not instill complete agency, however almost immediately the effect of agency was detected; participants liked the idea of having expectations, of having a purpose. I emphasized that my intentions were twofold: for participants to share their knowledge and insight about life/family and to increase that knowledge. That second intention excited many participants; they were motivated to have an opportunity for intellectual and personal growth. With community-based learning this is the motivation we seek in our students, but we often fail to provide it for our community partners.

An ironic but important aspect to providing purpose and responsibility, and agency, is tasking community partners with requirements. I use the term *ironic* because part of the concept of agency

is the idea that individuals have freedom to act, and tasking partners with requirements on the surface seems to restrict any freedom. However, it is this tasking that provides community partners with purpose and responsibility and the knowledge that there are expectations, that they have an important role to play, and that they are integral to the process establishes agency.

Control and Voice

A second area where agency was nurtured was by providing the community partners with control and having a voice. At the initial meeting with the first class, I conducted a lengthy question-and-answer period where I addressed questions and concerns from the participants and perhaps more importantly, solicited feedback. Again, the community partners did not have a voice in creating the project guidelines, but they did have control and a voice in how the project would be carried out. Allowing the community participants to determine how the meetings should go, how the project should look, and so on established a sense of control over the project for the partners and comfort and confidence in knowing they had a voice in the process.

Having learned from the first experience that having an established project limited agency, when I met for the first time with the partners for the second class, the goal was to involve them in shaping the project. I met with students and participants, and we brainstormed possible directions to take the project. Ultimately, the group wanted to do something similar to the previous project with the shared reading; however, they wanted more options for a final product. I did provide the group with a list of possible books and allowed them to vote on one. For the project, the group developed a list of ideas and voted. There was a tie, and so I told the group that they could decide with their partners which option they wanted to complete.

The focus on control and voice was then furthered through the partnerships. Rather than having students just come and talk or just come and listen, the community partners were able to work with the students to determine how each meeting would go and how the final project would look. At every stage of the community-based learning process, the participants were allowed and encouraged

to voice their opinions and to steer the project with their student partners.

Activity and Production

The third area where agency was achieved was through the active nature of the interactions and the completion of a final "product." Many community-based learning projects with an older population involve college students speaking to, or listening to, members of an older generation. Despite the action of "speaking," this interaction is a fairly passive one in that they are not goal-specific interactions. The projects discussed in this article are different in that the interactions in the meetings are goal oriented and are therefore more "active" interactions. Partners were tasked with discussing course material, a book, and so on, which created discussions that sought answers and solutions as opposed to discussing for the sake of discussing.

Perhaps the most effective component in achieving agency was the final "project." Often in community-based learning our students produce a final product such as a written composition or an oral presentation. In any final work a sense of accomplishment and validation is achieved, and both of these feelings speak to agency. However, what is unique about the projects discussed in this article is the involvement of the community partners in the final product. Rather than have the college students take what they learned throughout the experience and apply it in a final project, I have both the students and their community partners take what they learned *together* and *together* apply it in a final project. This active involvement in producing something tangible was vital in developing agency among the community partners.

In sum, a focused effort to create and nurture agency was important for the experience of the community partners and also for students. Rather than have the students simply go and talk with someone who is older, such as volunteering at a nursing home, I hoped to create a project where the community partner felt they were a part of the learning process through discussions and interaction. By having the students engage their senior partners in discussions about class content as opposed to just asking questions, the students get a real perspective on concepts and theories while the senior partners get an academic understanding of some of their experiences. By "requiring" the senior partners to read a book and participate in producing a final project, they have an opportunity to learn for themselves and are empowered through agency. Ultimately the senior partners achieve academic learning and experience personal growth—thereby achieving that third pedagogical goal of community-based learning by simply expanding the first two to include community partners.

EFFECTIVENESS

There was an increase in student enrollment from 14 students and 8 community participants in the Sociology of the Life Course class to 19 students and 13 community participants in the Sociology of the Family course. The increase in student enrollment is largely unrelated to the community-based learning project; however, the increase in community partner participation is an indicator of the success of the projects.

I conducted qualitative assessments of all student and community partner course evaluations. Among general information, students and community partners were asked about partner dynamics, individual meetings, the assignment, the book, what was learned about life course/family, what was learned about the self, and what was learned about the other group (college students/elderly).

Through content analysis, the written evaluations provide an understanding of the participants' perceptions and the meaning they identified in their experiences (Berg 2004). The simple content analysis of these data was completed by reading and re-reading the data and by organizing data into themes that emerged (student assessments) or predetermined categories (community partner assessments). The decision for a more deductive approach for the community partner assessments versus the more inductive approach for the student assessments is based on the goals of analysis. These goals include testing the pedagogical objectives for the community partners and exploring the benefits for students. The primary finding is that community members appear to have achieved agency and this enhanced their experience; in addition, the positive findings regarding student learning are

Table 1. Themes of Effectiveness

Theme	Frequency	Percentage of overall sample
Students	33	100
True partnership	19	57
Activity and production	14	42
Critical reflection	26	79
Community partners	21	100
Purpose and responsibility	19	90
Control and voice	20	95
Activity and production	19	90

also important as they suggest that one can focus on community benefits while still achieving the student goals of service-learning.

For the student assessments ($N = 33$), there are three main themes that emerged: feelings of a true partnership, activity and production, and critical reflection. For the community partner assessments ($N = 21$), data were organized into the three broad themes of purpose and responsibility, control and voice, and activity and production. These categories and the corresponding frequencies are shown in Table 1. The frequency column shows how many participants express these concepts, and the percentage column is the percentage of participants from their distinct group that fall under the theme/concept. The following section provides actual responses to lend a voice to the data.

Student Perspective

True partnership. The college students commented on how these particular projects felt more like a "true partnership" compared to other community-based learning experiences or even group/partner projects with other students.

> I really felt like I bonded with my partner. When I do class projects with other students—we're just two people working on the same thing. With this, we were one "thing" working on the same thing.

> This to me was a real partnership. We both were invested in each other—not just what we were doing, but in each other. Having a

true partner made me work harder and learn more.

> Usually when we do stuff in the community it feels like other people are really just "other people" and are just "there." My partner wasn't just another person, she was a true partner, she was *there*—in every moment, involved in every way. It was a real combined effort.

Activity and production. The only theme that directly relates to a theme from the community partner perspective is activity and production. College students articulate the feeling of engagement through activity and validation through completion of a tangible product.

> What I liked about this project was that we actually got to make something. The discussions were great, but working with my partner to produce the essay really made me feel like we accomplished something.

> At first I didn't like that we had to drive to meet our partners and I didn't think we'd have enough to talk about for one hour— forget ten hours. Instead I found that we always ran out of time, our meetings were so active and intense, so full. It wasn't boring or passive, it forced me to interact and I got more out of it because of it.

> The final handbook really drove us. From our first meeting we talked about how we

both were excited to work on it! Knowing that we had something we needed to finish gave us things to talk about and something to look forward to. Now I have something to show that goes with the memories I talk about.

Critical reflection. The last theme of critical reflection has to do with the depth of the impact the learning had on students. College students express immense introspection, discussing how the community-based learning made them think more about class, think more outside of class, and think about themselves.

I learned everything I didn't expect to learn. I thought this was just going to be a typical experience, but I learned more from my partner than I did my book. I would read for class, then talk about that stuff with my partner, then re-think things.

I would think about the things I talked about with my partner the rest of the day/night, even days later. I would talk about it with my friends and family, I couldn't stop thinking about this class and the discussions with my partner! I think I learned more about how sociologists look at the family, learned more about my family, and surprisingly more about myself. I don't know if this was your intent, but I feel like I added to my family with my partner and that I am a different person than I was at the start of the semester.

Community Partner Perspective

Purpose and responsibility. One of the goals of the projects was to create agency through responsibility. The rationale was that giving the community partners responsibility would give them more of a stake in the process and therefore would create a more effective experience. In their evaluations, community partners express the importance of both purpose and responsibility.

I learned a lot, but at first I didn't think I would learn anything, it's been years since

I've had to do anything academic. I read for pleasure, I talk about things with people, but having "homework" and having to work on the essay gave me an energy and feeling I haven't had in awhile.

Knowing that each meeting we would be discussing real issues and working on something gave me something to look forward to each day, and a sense of importance because it wasn't that somebody was coming to talk to me or do something for me, it was that I had something I needed to do and somebody was counting on me to do work.

There aren't many things we can do that make us feel young, or even normal. Old people don't do schoolwork, old people don't interview young people. I felt better than I have in awhile because there were things to get done, and I actually learned things because I wasn't just spinning my wheels.

Control and voice. The second goal related to creating agency was providing opportunities for community partners to have control of their experiences and a voice throughout the entire process. Community partners expressed that being equal partners in the project was a valuable part to their experience.

I like that my partner asked me how I wanted the meetings to go. He told me what we had to do and asked me how I wanted to go about doing it. So we spent most of our first meeting talking about what we wanted to do, when we wanted to do it, and how to tackle this thing. It made me feel like I was a part of something. Usually if you do a program at the center, you have to be there a certain time and everything is already set-up and you just follow instructions. This program was more open and I could get more out of it because I had more say into what went into it.

When you get old, people start treating you as a lesser person—very condescending and

demeaning. Even in programs that are offered for us older people, it usually makes us feel like crap because people are telling us our business and we're just supposed to take it. This experience treated me like I was a normal person, equal with the college students.

Activity and production. The final aspect to developing agency was the active nature of the experience and the completion of a final product. Community partners spoke to being energized by the interactions with the students and fulfilled by work on the final product.

I've had people come to the center to talk to me (more like talk at me) and all we do is sit and talk. We met at my house, we met at campus, we met at a coffee shop, we talked about my life, talked about her life, it was intense in a good way. I looked forward to every meeting with excitement and energy because I knew I was actually going to be doing something.

The final project made the entire experience. When I've done things with high schoolers or college students, they usually come and talk and then leave. I was so happy to be able to work with my partner on writing that essay, I really feel like I accomplished something.

I'm so proud of our final project. At first we were going to write the handbook, but I wanted to see if I could do an interview and write something. I can now say that I finished a college assignment and can prove it! I talked about the entire experience with my kids and grandkids (who are in college), but showing them that final project will be a great moment for me.

CONCLUSION

The projects described in this article were effective primarily because of an approach that focused on creating agency among the community partners. The projects were based on the community-based

learning literature that calls for opportunities for application of course material, critical reflection, and collaboration, but the addition of making the community partners active learners alongside the students is central to why the projects were successful both for the students and the community partners.

Limitations

The intent of this teaching note is not to suggest generalizability, but rather to offer a model for replication. To that end, it should be noted that there are some limitations to this kind of learning. For example, I had some students who did not have access to transportation, and as a result, I partnered them with another college student who did. There is also the issue of the books for community partners. Our department budgeted for the books and purchased them for the community partners, however not all institutions may be able to do this. Issues such as these come up with any attempts to learn outside of the classroom, and these projects are no different.

The student population might also limit the ability to implement this kind of project. My students are primarily traditional college students, and while they are heavily involved in campus and work obligations, most students do not have the responsibilities of a full-time job or a family. Institutions or classes that have more nontraditional students (students with full-time jobs and/or families) may have some difficulty, or certainly unique challenges, to executing this kind of learning.

Similar to the student population, the success and effectiveness of any community-based learning effort is dependent on the community partner. It is therefore vital to establish a strong relationship with a director or activities director of an organization (like a senior center) to ensure that the partnerships and the overall project are successful.

The size of the class is also important in the success of this type of project. Both classes discussed in this article were under 20 students, and under 35 when you include the community partners. For large classes, the identification of community partners and the logistics of meeting times and places may prove too difficult. The spirit of the

project can still be pursued in larger classes; however, some creative adjustments would have to be made to execute the logistics of the project.

Another difficulty with this model for faculty is essentially that you are doubling your class size. With any community-based learning, faculty assume a more strenuous workload as there are many logistical efforts needed to create and employ a community partnership. By focusing on creating agency, faculty are incurring even more time and work in order to develop and nurture agency among community partner participants. While there is certainly more work, the outcomes validate that work. Creating agency among community partners benefits all stakeholders; agency provides a better experience for the community partner, enhances the academic and personal learning experiences of the students involved, and certainly makes for a more rewarding teaching experience.

Future Possibilities

As discussed, the intentional efforts to create agency are inspired by outcomes from the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. With the success of the projects described in this article, there are now two established populations (the incarcerated and older persons) where creating agency is beneficial to a community-based learning experience. This finding of how agency plays a significant role is not limited to incarcerated or older community partners, and the importance of agency in effective community-based learning should be explored in other populations.

There are two other populations where I think this model could be effectively applied with powerful outcomes, the homeless and juveniles. I have argued that part of the importance of establishing agency in incarcerated and elder populations is because these are groups that have been denied agency in society. Homeless individuals may or may not feel a lack of agency, but regardless they are not granted agency from members and institutions in society. Engaging the homeless population in a project like the ones described in this article, with a focus on developing agency, would not only enhance the project but could have very real positive community outcomes. Giving a purpose, a

voice, control, and a tangible product to validate accomplishment to this population may have more of an impact on the community than volunteering at a homeless shelter. There are some obvious logistical obstacles to doing this project with a homeless population, such as carrying out a semester-long project with a transient population; however, such obstacles can certainly be addressed.

I believe this model can also be applied to juveniles. It can be argued that juveniles have not necessarily been denied agency, but rather have not achieved it for themselves. Yet regardless of the cause, the outcome is still a lack of agency for this population. Personally I plan on attempting a project with juvenile delinquents where college students gain insight into delinquency while the community partners, the juveniles, also learn about delinquency while possibly experiencing personal growth. Similar to the potential outcomes for the homeless, I believe there can be a broader impact on the community with the benefits this model provides for community partners.

While much of the discussion has focused on groups that are typically without agency, I do not think that the applicability of this approach is restricted to this category of person. If the goals of a community-based learning opportunity include having a positive impact on the community, or on the population with which the students are working, then an emphasis on developing agency would be important for any population. While I believe in the social value of developing agency in populations who lack it, I also believe in the pedagogical value of developing agency in community partners for any community-based learning. It is because of this value that I believe this approach to service-learning can be used for most content areas and with most populations.

NOTES

1. Some detail is left out of these excerpts. Detailed handouts provided to the students are available from the author.

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