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Carolyn Casale
*Adams State University*, carolyncasale@adams.edu

C. Adrainne Thomas
*Virginia State University*, athomas@vsu.edu

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Community Engagement through Interactive Field-Based Activities

CAROLYN CASALE and C. ADRAINNE THOMAS
Adams State University Virginia State University

Abstract. This qualitative case study consisted of social justice interactive field-based experiential learning activities designed to understand community partnerships between a university and local public school. The research question was: How can interactive field-based activities build closer community ties? The theoretical foundation incorporated Ken Zeichner’s “hybrid spaces” with the premise of field-based interactive experiences. The findings indicated the need for further activities that create partnerships between teacher education programs and neighboring public schools.

This qualitative case study reflects the results of a community-based field experience that served to build community and racial harmony. The theoretical frameworks that inform this study are: (a) hybrid spaces (Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015), (b) experiential learning (Dewey, 1933), and (c) culturally responsive teaching strategies (Howard, 2003). The main objectives of the activities were to promote social justice and civil engagement across diverse communities; and develop closer partnership ties between a college of education and local schools. This study explored how a public teacher education college can develop community ties with neighboring secondary and primary schools. The main research question was: How can interactive, experiential-learning activities build closer community ties?

Introduction

This research takes place in the Mississippi Delta. This is an area stricken by poverty and inequality compounded by a lack of empathetic awareness. The Mississippi Delta has historically experienced high rates of poverty and inequality, particularly for African Americans. In contrast, the university in focus is often referred to as a “white” institution. This has led to undertones of a disconnect. The demographic difference between
the university faculty (overwhelmingly white) and the community (predominantly African American) is stark. In fact, cultural artifacts (such as a plantation mascot) subtly and directly reinforce an unwelcome atmosphere for African Americans. However, public school teachers held strong beliefs in experiential learning with an emphasis on interactive learning. To touch on these community concerns and promote interactive activities, a university professor of teacher education and a high school social studies teacher discussed ways to promote social justice and build closer community ties. These individuals conceived this project with the research question as the focal point. This focus on learning about and building closer community ties is a growing emphasis in teacher education preservice courses. For preservice teachers (who are predominantly white females) there is a need to consciously reflect on and learn about communities they will be working in, particularly those which are culturally and/or linguistically different.

Two social justice field trips were arranged to the WWII Japanese American Internment Museum in McGehee, Arkansas, and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. These trip locations were purposefully selected to highlight injustices that have occurred in United States history. At both locations, the teachers and faculty requested guided tours that told the stories of injustices and those who protested those inequalities. The trips were intentionally planned to engage and promote social justice awareness. During the field trips students engaged in interactive activities surrounding the internment of Japanese Americans and the plight of African Americans during the civil rights era. In addition, participants engaged in various interactive community-building exercises. These activities included asking participants to reflect on a museum exhibit and share their reflection with another participant who did not know. Faculty from the university and high school encouraged participants to go outside their comfort area and connect with people who they perceive as different from themselves, particularly from university to high school and vice versa. The participants were eleventh- and twelfth-grade social studies students from a public high school, and university students majoring in social science and/or secondary education.

The significance of this research was in understanding the multi-layered components of developing community ties between colleges of education and public schools surrounding social justice themes. Further, this research sought to build third or hybrid spaces (Zeichner, 2010) to promote discussions surrounding issues relevant to the student body. Another objective of the project was to expose high school students from low socio-economic communities to information and places outside their communities, and particularly in the field of social justice.

Theoretical Framework

This study incorporated an integrated theoretical frame that consisted of (a) hybrid spaces (Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner et al. 2015), (b) experiential learning (Dewey, 1933), and (c) culturally responsive teaching strategies (Howard, 2003) with an emphasis on interactive learning strategies within a community-centered field trip. The main premise was that educational field-based experiences can provide transformative change in society. Teachers and students are transformation agents and engagement in experiential learning is an essential component of that transformation. Dewey (1933) posited that:

I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life. . . . I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth. (p. 80)

Zeichner (2010) suggested the solution to the disconnect between universities and public education involves creating third or hybrid spaces for an “equal and more dialectical relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge in support of student teacher learning” (p. 92). The authors of this article argued that authentic community partnerships require critical reflection on characteristics of race, class, gender, and other significant contextual concerns.

Solving societal problems requires recognition that the problems exist; are a part of complex society systems; and affect universities and community systems (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Efforts to solve societal problems require new approaches to knowledge generation within the context of partnerships, collaboration, exchange of ideas, and co-creation of solutions. Universities can contribute to developing constructivist spaces through community engagement and play a central role in conducting the activities required to enable individuals to become civically engaged as citizens. The authors further argued that universities serve to promote “democratizing knowledge through cocreation and authentic partnerships” (p. 247). Checkoway (2015) contended that universities should view research as “a process which builds community” (p. 139) and utilize its resources to support research and other community-building activities. This research study represents an effort towards community building.

Reflective & Culturally Relevant Practices

Dewey (1933) describes reflective thought as an active, persistent, and
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Dewey (1933) describes reflective thought as an active, persistent, and
The willingness to ask tough questions about his or her own attitudes measure an educator’s level of concern for the well-being of their students. Critical teacher reflection is an essential component of culturally relevant pedagogy because it can, in effect, reflect middle-class, European American cultural values, and thus seeks to incorporate a wider range of dynamic and fluid teaching practices.

First, teachers must acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, and placement, and critique their own thoughts and practices to ensure they do not reinforce prejudice behavior. Second, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the explicit connection between culture and learning, and sees students’ cultural capital as an asset and not a detriment to their school success. Third, culturally relevant teaching is mindful of how traditional teaching practices reflect middle-class, European American cultural values, and thus seeks to incorporate a wider range of dynamic and fluid teaching practices.

Effective reflection of race within a diverse cultural context requires teachers to engage in one of the more difficult processes for all individuals—honest self-reflection and critique of their own thoughts and behaviors. (Howard, 2003, pp. 197-198)

Moreover, critical reflection requires educators to explore deeper levels of self-knowledge, and to recognize the impact of one’s own world view on students’ perceptions of themselves. Critical teacher reflection is an essential component of culturally relevant pedagogy because it can, in effect, measure an educator’s level of concern for the well-being of their students. The willingness to ask tough questions about his or her own attitudes toward diverse students can reflect the true commitment an educator has toward their students’ academic success and emotional well-being.

Finally, culturally relevant pedagogical strategies combined with interactive activities can foster learning. Dewey (1933) argued that experiential learning was based on the premise that field experiences are relevant to the learning process. Further, the activities should be interactive and include participant reflections on the experiences of the day, on their background, and on those with whom they interacted. The purpose of the interactive activities was for participants to mingle among one another and develop closer ties.

Community Literature

In conducting partnership research, Noel (2010) stated the importance of critically reflecting on positions of privilege. Noel (2010) stated, “I must consistently consider how people in the neighborhoods may take a racially, economically, and educationally marked view of me, marking me as an ‘other’ while still assigning me with privilege” (p. 210). Noel (2011) argued that to develop authentic community engagement there needs to be three essential components:

1. being physically located at the school or community site in order to build trust and become integrated into the life of the school or community,
2. conducting community studies in order to learn about and understand the lives of community members, and
3. becoming involved in community engagement activities. (p. 31)

In the above quote, Noel outlined the elements to developing partnerships between universities and schools. The development takes place over time through the demonstrated commitment to, and real involvement in, the community. In this study, race and geography played a significant role in this process. For example, the first researcher was a middle-class White northern woman and the community was predominantly African American, lower income and from the South. When this researcher spoke, the Northern accent made it clear that was she was not from the community and a common assumption was that she would not stay. This led to challenges in demonstrating a commitment, particularly to the public schools. This commitment was partly demonstrated by the researcher sending her child to a local public school when, often, middle-class White southerners send their children to private schools that are predominantly white.

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careful consideration of any belief or form of knowledge with regard to the grounds that support it, and conclusions drawn. He further equated reflective thought to intellectual thinking. Self-reflection and cultural critical consciousness are essential to improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Both involve thorough analysis and careful monitoring of personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity, and the most effective ways to teach racially and ethnically diverse students. In order to engage in these continuous analyses and efforts to make teaching more relevant to diverse students, teachers must not only have a thorough understanding of their own cultures and the cultures of different ethnic groups, but also have an understanding of how this engagement affects teaching and learning behaviors. Howard (2003) posited that critical reflection is crucial to the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. Further, the notion of “reflective action” is what Dewey (1933) referred to as the active component of behavioral intervention. Once cognitive processing is complete, reflective action can serve as a more useful tool for addressing social and emotional issues, such as those pertaining to race and culture.

Howard further stated that critical reflection should include an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students’ thinking, learning, and various understandings of the world. To support this, Howard (2003) suggested three areas that are essential to the development of culturally relevant teaching practices:

First, teachers must acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, and placement, and critique their own thoughts and practices to ensure they do not reinforce prejudice behavior. Second, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the explicit connection between culture and learning, and sees students’ cultural capital as an asset and not a detriment to their school success. Third, culturally relevant teaching is mindful of how traditional teaching practices reflect middle-class, European American cultural values, and thus seeks to incorporate a wider range of dynamic and fluid teaching practices.
(in this case, geographical considerations). Geographic roots played a role in how this researcher was perceived within the community by different groups. Again, having a distinctive Northern accent led local African-American stakeholders to believe our views were aligned, but long-term commitment was questioned. To paraphrase one administrator: ‘your people are good, but you don’t stay.’ In contrast, Southern Whites often avoided discussions on social justice or community. The second author was an African American from the north and did not attend the field trips nor interact directly with the participants nor the stakeholders. Her role was to provide an objective view of the data, and a neutral tone in the data analysis and thematic organization.

Noel (2011) posited the need for reflection on the types of partnership activities and roles of various players, and suggested that there needs to be a move away from a “university-led focus” that may often sustain “an inequality of roles, with university programs and faculty members setting the tone for interactions” (p. 32). When considering the day-to-day components of this project, the first researcher was consciously aware of the perceived privileged space of being from the university. An effort was made to emphasize the knowledge base and contributions of community members. As Noel (2011) argued, an authentic community partnership involves “shared goals, procedures, and beliefs” (p. 36). In this research, the coordinating university faculty member and high school teacher had a shared vision to expand their students’ understanding through a field experience. Noel (2011) stated that trust is an essential element in developing engaged communities.

Similar to Noel (2011), Haddix (2015) drew attention to “the danger in simply requiring curriculum or field experiences in diverse settings, yet failing to uncover and address issues of racism and social and educational inequities” (p. 64). She contended that this might lead teacher candidates to “deficit ways” of thinking about low-income communities (p. 64); but community-engaged field experiences could lead to “consciousness-raising experiences that hold great potential for affecting the teachers they become” (p. 69). She further argued that preservice teachers need information on the “realities of teaching and learning” and that this can be accomplished through “incorporating opportunities for community engagement beyond classroom walls” (p. 63).

Guillen and Zeichner (2018) focused on the positive effects of university-community partnerships in developing teacher educators. A significant benefit is the ability to “access the expertise within families and communities” (p. 140). Drawing on the concept of democratizing teacher education (Zeichner, 2015), Guillen and Zeichner (2018) suggested the “idea of partnering with families and communities to create more democratic, less hierarchical teacher education programs” (p. 141). They further emphasized building partnerships through shared responsibility. Implicit in this is building trust through addressing concerns surrounding social justice. However, they noted difficulties in the “development of trusting relationships” (p. 142).

Evans-Andris et al. (2014) postulated that (a) research connects the importance of community engagement to teacher accreditation bodies, and (b) the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards emphasize a shift in teacher education toward engaged clinical experiences. Specifically, “Standard 2 focuses on partnerships for clinical preparation, clinical educators, and clinical experiences” (Evans-Andris et al., 2014, p. 466). Evans-Andris et al. (2014) argued the need for community stakeholders to share the workload and that “Over time, the liaison’s role expanded as she gained acceptance from the principal and teachers” (p. 469). Further, they stated, “This side-by-side working together reinforced the core value that partners share responsibility for the support and improvement of teaching and learning, and the subsequent results” (p. 469).

This was true of my role as an unofficial liaison. In my first year, I supervised student’s clinical experiences in the field. In this capacity I listened, observed, and learned. I thought about which teachers would want to create a meaningful partnership that would positively affect our students. In my second year, I co-taught a series of lessons with another faculty member in a district high school. From these interactions over time, I was able to develop a positive rapport and demonstrate my commitment to improving academic performance. This directly led to co-designing the field trips in my third year as a faculty member.

Reischl, Khasnabis, and Karr (2017) contended that partnerships take time and include a shift in emphasis from the university setting to the school setting. They also noted that “partnering deepens and changes over time” (p. 52), and provided an array of questions for the various components in the cascade of partnership activities. They further argued that positive change happens “through highly contextualized, thoughtful participation of key players in joint productive activity in schools” (p. 52).

**Research Design & Methodology**

Merriam and Grenier (2002) argued that the purpose of qualitative research is, “to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences” (p. 5). This is relevant to “making sense” with
(in this case, geographical considerations). Geographic roots played a role in how this researcher was perceived within the community by different groups. Again, having a distinctive Northern accent led local African-American stakeholders to believe our views were aligned, but long-term commitment was questioned. To paraphrase one administrator: ‘your people are good, but you don’t stay.’ In contrast, Southern Whites often avoided discussions on social justice or community. The second author was an African American from the north and did not attend the field trips nor interact directly with the participants nor the stakeholders. Her role was to provide an objective view of the data, and a neutral tone in the data analysis and thematic organization.

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The superintendent of the district, the principal and the teachers were highly interested in this university-school partnership. The idea originated with a social studies teacher and a faculty member in the school of education. After four ongoing discussions, they agreed on two trips: the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, and the WWII Japanese American Internment Museum at the Rohwer Heritage Site in McGehee, Arkansas. The belief was that the high school students would be intrinsically motivated to attend because many had not traveled outside of their region. U.S. History was a required course and the trip was a means of experiencing elements of the course firsthand. In addition, secondary education social science preservice teachers from the university were able to acquire practical experience working with the population they planned to work with in the future.

This study was Internal Review Board-approved and received funding from internal university diversity committees and faculty grants. The funds covered the costs of transportation, food, and t-shirts for participants. The t-shirts were a means of identifying participants in an unfamiliar setting and served to identify the participants as part of a university-high school partnership. The t-shirts were all the same color and bore the logos from both the university and high school.

**Research Participants**

Eight-eight participants completed this study—51 high school juniors and seniors, and 37 secondary level preservice teachers. Nine of the participants went on both trips but only completed one pre- and post-questionnaire. One-hundred percent of the participants completed the pre-questionnaire and 98.8 percent (87/88) completed the post-questionnaire. The high rates of completion on the pre- and post-questionnaire are attributed to participants’ verbal commitment to participate in the various interactive activities as a pre-condition to attend the trip. Thereafter, participants had the option to remove their names from the study, but all committed to complete the trip activities.

The data collection took place on the two trips in February, 2018. The data consisted of responses to a pre- and post-trip questionnaire with reflective prompts designed to elicit rich data on ideas surrounding community and social justice issues. Throughout the two trips, students engaged in interactive activities that encouraged them to think outside their comfort zone. Participants were paired with someone they did not know, and, at the beginning and conclusion of each field experience, they completed a pre- and post-questionnaire (Appendix B and C, respectively). The data for the 9 participants who attended both trips consisted of the pre-questionnaire from the first trip and the post-questionnaire from the second trip. The trips were about two weeks apart.

**Findings**

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: the importance of community, an expanded view of community, and the role of community in social justice. The post-questionnaire question three asked, “What did you learn about community on this trip?”. Eighty-five of the 88 participants responses fell into three main categories: the importance of building community (33 participants); community is larger than they thought (35 participants); and the importance of community in fighting for social justice (17 participants). Three responses did not fit into any one particular thematic category.

**The Importance of Community**

The importance of building community also had a sub-theme that included meeting new people, such as in these responses: “coming together is important” (participant 85); “That community is stronger that we think” (participant 31). Eleven of the 33 participants in this category mentioned meeting new people from different backgrounds. For example, Participant 73 commented, “There are more perspectives than just the people that I normally surround myself with. It is easy for me to keep contact with just the people I am comfortable with.” For example, Participant 18 noted separations in community. Participant 18 stated, “After this experience I see my community as weaker than before. We are not together as one. We are coming together, but there is a lot of separation.” This response is significant because Participant 18 attended both trips. Another participant, number 21, stated that their view had changed, but that, “I still see cliques amongst us.”

**Expanded View of Community**

Seventy-one of the 88 participants defined community as “a group of people who live in the same area as you” (participant 3). Summarizing this, Participant 22 stated, “community is a group of people living in the same
how participants interpret their environments (Merriam & Grenier, 2002). This qualitative research study sought to answer the following research question: How can interactive experiential-learning activities build closer community ties? Data consisted of qualitative responses from pre- and post-questionnaires based upon interactive community-building activities.

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Research Participants

Eight-eight participants completed this study—51 high school juniors and seniors, and 37 secondary level preservice teachers. Nine of the participants went on both trips but only completed one pre- and post-questionnaire. One-hundred percent of the participants completed the pre-questionnaire and 98.8 percent (87/88) completed the post-questionnaire. The high rates of completion on the pre- and post-questionnaire are attributed to participants’ verbal commitment to participate in the various interactive activities as a pre-condition to attend the trip. Thereafter, participants had the option to remove their names from the study, but all committed to complete the trip activities.

The data collection took place on the two trips in February, 2018. The data consisted of responses to a pre- and post-trip questionnaire with reflective prompts designed to elicit rich data on ideas surrounding community and social justice issues. Throughout the two trips, students engaged in interactive activities that encouraged them to think outside their comfort zone. Participants were paired with someone they did not know, and, at the beginning and conclusion of each field experience, they completed a pre- and post-questionnaire (Appendix B and C, respectively). The data for the 9 participants who attended both trips consisted of the pre-questionnaire from the first trip and the post-questionnaire from the second trip. The trips were about two weeks apart.

Findings

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: the importance of community, an expanded view of community, and the role of community in social justice. The post-questionnaire question three asked, “What did you learn about community on this trip?”. Eighty-five of the 88 participants responses fell into three main categories: the importance of building community (33 participants); community is larger than they thought (35 participants); and the importance of community in fighting for social justice (17 participants). Three responses did not fit into any one particular thematic category.

The Importance of Community

The importance of building community also had a sub-theme that included meeting new people, such as in these responses: “coming together is important” (participant 85); “That community is stronger than we think” (participant 31). Eleven of the 33 participants in this category mentioned meeting new people from different backgrounds. For example, Participant 73 commented, “There are more perspectives than just the people that I normally surround myself with. It is easy for me to keep contact with just the people I am comfortable with.” For example, Participant 18 noted separations in community. Participant 18 stated, “After this experience I see my community as weaker than before. We are not together as one. We are coming together, but there is a lot of separation.” This response is significant because Participant 18 attended both trips. Another participant, number 21, stated that their view had changed, but that, “I still see cliques amongst us.”

Expanded View of Community

Seventy-one of the 88 participants defined community as “a group of people who live in the same area as you” (participant 3). Summarizing this, Participant 22 stated, “community is a group of people living in the same
The 19 participants consistently remarked that their definition of community is larger than their immediate surroundings. For example, participant 86 stated, “I learned a community consists of a huge diverse population.” Similarly, participant 27 stated, “I learned your community can be stretched far and wide.” Participants grouped in this thematic category emphasized their view of an expansive definition of community. In contrast, in the post-questionnaire, the definition of who was in the community was more expanded. The post-questionnaire asked, “Is your community more than what you thought it was?” From the 87 participants who completed the questionnaire, 28 did not respond, and 4 already had a world view of their community. For example, Participant 37 stated, “I have always felt a broader sense of community.” Similarly, Participant 14 explained that this trip did not expand their definition of community. In contrast, 45 responded yes, their view of community has changed by expanding who is in their community. An example of this is in Participant 3’s response. Participant 3 responded, “... I still see my community the same [I] just am more aware of how big it actually is.” Interestingly, Participant 46 concluded that after this trip, the belief is that “community can be created.” Similarly, Participant 33 stated, “I hope my community continues to grow.”

The Role of Community in Social Justice

Seventeen of the participants connected the importance of community to fighting for social justice. For example: “It takes a village to raise a child, but it only takes a community of people to make a small change. It does matter. Every comment, every thought, every opportunity matters” (participant 17); “I learned that you can’t survive though hard times without [community]” (participant 18); “I learned that a community can bond over a hardship ... that they have to band together to overcome” (participant 46).

The trips encompassed the theme of community through interactive exercises and through looking at historical injustices, specifically the struggles of African Americans (at the National Civil Rights Museum) and Japanese Americans (at the WWII Japanese American Internment Museum). The fourth question on the post-questionnaire asked participants, “what did you learn/experience that defined your day?”. The intention of this question was to create a space for participants to express their thoughts about the day. Their responses varied.

The responses that noted historical information consisted of those that listed specific things they learned about history from the exhibits in the museum. The next largest category of 36 participants’ responses connected the events they learned to their personal lives. These participants discussed a variety of reactions or lessons learned from the day. For example, Participant 2 stated, “I learned greater perspective of my privilege as a white man”; Participant 13 stated, “everyone is connected”; Participant 12, “I learned patience”; Participant 14, “being aware of your surroundings”; and participant 20 stated, “... I want to stand up and help all I can, help the helpless and the voiceless.”

Interestingly, three of those who personally connected also linked their personal experience to the role of government in systematic discrimination. For example, Participant 60 stated, “I learned that the U.S. government can set into motion anything they vote on, even things that could be harmful or violate morals and rules.” Similarly, Participant 78 stated, “I learned that tyranny knows no bounds. You can be willing to die for your country and you might still be persecuted.”

Three participants connected the factual exhibits to their lives. For example, Participant 17 stated, “the slideshows of videos inside the dinner area that showed demonstrations of how to prepare yourself for a sit-in. Their freedom to eat was jeopardized and in the hands of someone else. It awakens a deep sadness and opens a window of understanding.”

They also delved into the inequalities within their community. For example, five students independently expressed a connection between the National Civil Rights Museum and the Farmers Market. At the international Farmers Market, students observed that there was a wide diversity of products at a cheaper price than in their community. Specifically, these five students expressed amazement at the cheaper prices for better quality fresh produce found at the Memphis Farmers Market. All five of these students expressed frustration with the lack of options in rural communities and expressed that this represented an inequality.

One participant’s response was unreadable and ten participants discussed unexpected topics ranging from our stop at an international market, to the lunch, to being “no longer afraid to cross a river bridge” (participant 85).
[area] with common characteristics and interests.” From these 71 participants there was variation in who was in their community. The answers ranged from localities to state, national and international. Adding a different dimension, seventeen participants defined community as people with the interest to make a “change” (participant 31) or “willing to make [it] a better place” (participant 32).

The 19 participants consistently remarked that their definition of community is larger than their immediate surroundings. For example, participant 86 stated, “I learned a community consists of a huge diverse population.” Similarly, participant 27 stated, “I learned your community can be stretched far and wide.” Participants grouped in this thematic category emphasized their view of an expansive definition of community. In contrast, in the post-questionnaire, the definition of who was in the community was more expanded. The post-questionnaire asked, “Is your community more than what you thought it was?” From the 87 participants who completed the questionnaire, 28 did not respond, and 4 already had a world view of their community. For example, Participant 37 stated, “I have always felt a broader sense of community.” Similarly, Participant 14 explained that this trip did not expand their definition of community. In contrast, 45 responded yes, their view of community has changed by expanding who is in their community. An example of this is in Participant 3’s response. Participant 3 stated, “I still see my community the same [I] just am more aware of how big it actually is.” Interestingly, Participant 46 concluded that after this trip, the belief is that “community can be created.” Similarly, Participant 33 stated, “I hope [my community] continues to grow.”

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Limitations

Within the larger community, there were negative comments from the high school teachers concerning a university decision that affected their community. The university broke with a locally owned business that had been a mainstay within the university, particularly in the past ten years. The switch to a nationally recognized competitor provoked community displeasure with the university. Although this was beyond the control of the College of Education, the actions of the university led to disparaging remarks on this community-driven initiative.

A limitation in this study was the lack of support from the administration. Although the College of Education was supportive, the Provost did not permit an excused absence for the university students to attend the trips (three faculty in three different colleges requested excused absences). That means the students may have been penalized for work missed due to attending the field trips, or may not have attended out of fear of such penalty. Therefore, it is possible that the lack of upper administrative support, implicitly devalued the community-engagement activities. Evans-Andris, et al. (2014) argued the importance of “university support for faculty who embed their teaching, research, and service endeavors in a clinical model of teacher education, especially those aiming toward tenure and promotion” (p. 475). Although the emphasis here is on evaluation standards for faculty in tenure and promotion criteria, upper university administrative support needs to be in place for successful community partnerships as well.

Lastly, another limitation is that the participant data did not delineate participants’ school affiliation; therefore, the distinction between university and high school participants blurred on the forms collected. The aggregated data, therefore, could not be used to discuss how this project specifically impacted the college students who participated. The researchers encouraged participants to mix with different groups of people, but did not have them mark their school affiliation on any of the data. The intention was to remove labels. With this noted, the researchers observed the participants mix and ask questions to those outside their school affiliation. In fact, prior to the trip, the faculty from the university and high school remarked how participants were interested to meet high school/university students.

Discussion

The main research question posited was: How can interactive field-based activities build closer community ties? The findings indicate that interactive field-based activities expand participants’ view of community and that can bring about closer community ties. Building closer connections between the university, schools, and community-at-large is a multi-step and ongoing process. This research is a foundational start in that process. According to Casapulla and Hess (2016), schools are central institutions in many rural communities, whose primary functions are to educate future decision-makers in the community, and to provide opportunities for the engagement and participation of its community members. Further, schools should offer students opportunities to understand their local communities as well as support and foster their development as citizens.

The literature supports the idea that students should be more engaged in their communities and that pedagogical interventions can impact the engagement level. This research modeled an experiential interactive multi-level service activity that promoted community engagement surrounding social justice. Further research is needed to understand how a college of education can build greater community connections that foster meaningful partnerships. The findings indicated that this particular community (high school and university participants) were eager to learn about one another. The field trip, along with the interactive activities, expanded their views of community. It would be in the interest of the university to invest in these types of community-engaged field-based activities. This is in alignment with Casapulla and Hess’ (2016) assertion that engagement education needs to be “place-focused, project-based, asset-driven, and democratically oriented” (p. 42), as well as other scholars who “challenged colleges and universities to become more engaged with the most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems in communities, and with public education in particular” (Daniels, 2013, p. 40). This aligned thematically with the role of community in social justice that emerged in this study.

However, university faculty and staff face “multi-dimensional ethical responsibilities across a networked community and university context” (Danley & Christiansen, 2019, p. 8). Universities struggle to fulfill their ethical responsibilities to a variety of local stakeholders, including university students, parents, municipalities, nonprofits, and others. Ethical activity within community partnerships is not simply the outcome of actions mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), such as consent and minimizing risk, but requires attention to conflicting responsibilities on both the individual and university level. We agree with Danley and Christiansen’s (2019) recommendation that universities incorporate community advisory boards to ensure attention to these complex ethical challenges that frequently happen outside the purview of IRB. Such boards require further study but have the potential to incorporate community voices in ways that
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help ensure the community is treated ethically across the university. This is of critical importance in a networked system with multi-dimensional and conflicting ethical responsibilities.

Finally, when schools play a vital role in the community, they’re able to provide “decentralized, democratic, community-based responses to ever-changing community problems” (Lester, Kronick & Benson, 2012, p. 45). Colleges and universities can assist local schools and communities by creating sustainable, mutually beneficial, and democratic partnerships.

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References


Appendix A

[NOTE: Response lines truncated for ease of reproduction.]

In Museum

YOUR NAME_____________________________________________________

1. Find an exhibit in the museum that you think is important. Take a picture of it. Describe the artifact. What is it? Why did you select this? Write 2-3 paragraphs on why you think that artifact is important.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

2. Find someone on our trip that you do not know and explain why you selected this artifact. Have that person write their name. Ask that person to comment and reflect on the exhibit you selected.

NAME of TRIP MATE_______________________________________________

Trip mate’s comments:

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Appendix B

[NOTE: Response lines truncated for ease of reproduction.]

Pre-Questionnaire

YOUR NAME_____________________________________________________

1. How do you define community? Please include who is in your community.

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________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________

2. What do you expect to learn about community on this field experience?

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3. Do you think you will meet someone different from you? How do you define different?

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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

4. Do you expect to experience/learn anything different today?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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4. Do you expect to experience/learn anything different today?

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Abstract: Millennial students and workers are high-achieving, have a strong desire for ongoing personal and professional development, and tend to be invested in making a sustainable impact on society and in the communities in which they live and work. One avenue to engage these students is community-engaged experiential learning (or service learning). While service learning is not new, this “civically-engaged” pedagogy has increased in popularity and usage. It provides meaningful community-service opportunities that simultaneously teach civic responsibility and encourage life-long civic engagement, while also providing significant real-life, hands-on learning of important skills and vital social understanding. This quantitative study examines the connections between students’ motivations for enrolling in service-learning courses and their perceived likelihood for course and program completion. It also connects student motivations for enrolling in service-learning courses to the literature on millennial students and preparing students for the future workforce. Findings not only identify gains in service-learning motivations overall, but also specific volunteerism motivations that contribute to students’ expressions of intent for course and program completion. The findings also demonstrate that study participants exhibited typical characteristics associated with the millennial generation and that these are strengthened through service-learning participation.

Keywords: Service learning, high-impact practices, learning outcomes, completion, millennial students

Engaging Millennial Students through Community-Engaged Experiential Learning

MAUREEN SNOW ANDRADE AND JONATHAN H. WESTOVER
Utah Valley University Utah Valley University

Service learning is a type of experiential-education pedagogy that consists of specifically designed learning activities that address community needs, and benefit both the student providing the service and the community recipient (Jacoby, 1996). Institutions of higher education are increasingly embracing service learning and similar pedagogical strategies to help students develop the essential learning outcomes valued by employers. These skills include problem solving, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, valuing diversity and the application of knowledge in real-life

Appendix C

[NOTE: Response lines truncated for ease of reproduction.]

Post-Questionnaire

YOUR NAME_____________________________________________________

1. How do you define community? Please include who is in your community. After this experience, do you see your community differently? Is your community more than what you thought it was?

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2. What did you learn about community on this field trip?

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3. Write about someone new you met on this trip who is part of your community.

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4. What did you learn/experience that defined your day?

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