What's not to love about community psychology?

Recently there was a discussion on the EVALSYS listserv with the subject title: How can we get people to fall in love with systems ideas? As I read through the various rationales and justifications, all of which asserted the positive value associated with systems ideas, it struck me that we do not need to provide such arguments or justifications. After all, what's not to love about community psychology? We are immersed in a field that simply recognizes, acknowledges, and even fosters QUALITY human relationships in the context of ensuring the quality of people's lives. We represent flexibility, in approach, in interest, and in content that can encompass whatever, at one end, is compelling for us, and at the other, catches our fancy. How can anyone not love that! It seems to me that we have both a sense of community, with that shared purpose of McMillan and Chavis (1986), and a respect for differences that offers the possibility of inclusion to everyone.

It is that last piece, the possibility of inclusion, which seems most important to me. And here I focus on the inclusion of our members in SCRA. For those of us who are substantively and/or substantially involved, the sense of community is a given: we accept and expect it with our colleagues and collaborators. Important is the recognition that not all of our members may feel that same easy sense of belonging. Our Biennials always bring crowds and people come and go with a sense of exhilaration, but we don't always retain those who join SCRA at the Biennial as members in subsequent years. I offer several thoughts, along with some actions, about this.

First is actually a question: What are we (i.e. those who are SCRA-involved) doing to ensure that newcomers, or less involved 'oldcomers', feel connected? We have quite a selection of committees and interest groups, as is evident in the rest of this issue of The Community Psychologist, all of which would welcome the involvement of additional SCRA members. To that end, I have emailed the chairs of our SCRA committees and interest groups, suggesting that they consider developing specific outreach efforts to our current members.

Second is a suggestion for a call to action among those who consider themselves the more tangential members of SCRA. If you wish to be more involved, consider taking the risk to reach out to a committee or interest group, or to a member of the Executive Committee (listed here on page 2), including me (oconnp@sage.edu). Let us know simply that you are interested and we will find ways to draw you in, either into our existing structures or into new kinds of connections. As noted above, part of our flexibility is our desire to meet people in the colloquial, "where they are," to make new attachments and to expand our networks and connections. So, if you are among the less involved and only tangentially attached SCRA members, please, take a step forward!

Third is the recognition that some prefer tangential or limited attachments to professional organizations, or at least to SCRA. If you are among those, we are glad that you choose to be a part of our larger community. We value your 'lurking' on our listserv; appreciate your subscription to our journal and newsletter, and would welcome your increasing your activity if you should choose that.

So where are we now? We are increasingly strong as an organization, something mentioned in my last column, but the need for emphasis leads to repetition! We gain new members every month, particularly
through the recent ease with which one
can join through our website, thanks
to Scot Evans and our management
firm. Interestingly we are increasing our
visibility through nominations to APA
initiatives: we had five nominees to the
Children’s Mental Health Task Force
and another four to the Task Force on
Trafficking of Women and Girls. These
were primarily people who responded to
my call for opportunities to contribute,
which I note here because you also could
volunteer to be nominated!

Back to what’s not to love about
community psychology: we represent
careers, avocations, perspectives, and
aspirations. We focus on what our
members consider important. Maybe
our most compelling example is the
origination of the Practice Council which
has grown significantly, in numbers, in
influence, and in productivity and they
have the ongoing support from the SCRA
leadership. We recognize the opportunities
through connections, particularly though
our international linkages and links with
like-minded organizations. We treasure
those who have gone before, noteworthy
in the addition of the recognition of legacy
at the Biennials. Finally, we expect to
influence our future, particularly now
through our work in policy. We have
our ongoing policy initiatives through
the Executive Committee and through
our Policy Committee. The aim of the
Executive Committee is to link SCRA/
Community Psychology experts with
national advocacy initiatives. In our
upcoming (February 2011) SCRA mid-
winter meeting in Washington D.C.,
we will utilize some APA resources with
some training on policy development and
advocacy.

In conclusion, we need subject headings
such as “Another exciting … from
Community Psychology” in our email
listservs and others. We need to spread the
word about the excellence of our field. We
need to demonstrate that there’s a lot to
love about community psychology!

Reference
Sense of community: A definition
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Psychology, 14, 6-23.*
From the Editor
Maria B. J. Chun,
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa

Christmas Eve 2010. We are driving around the North Shore of the island of Oahu; an annual tradition of searching for what are sometimes monster winter waves that can hit up to 30 feet or more. No luck today. It is rainy and the bay is churning up salt and soot, but it is flat. Somehow I am amazed at the circumstances, knowing full well that there has never been a guarantee of a show for surfers, tourists, or kamaaina (locals). Nature is in charge and we have no control over what she decides to share. To me, this scene represents the opposite situation in our ongoing quest to define community psychology as a profession. As aspiring and practicing community psychologists, we can design the scenery and how big we would like our waves to be. However, as several articles in the current issue (and actually, a number of past issues) point out, the sea has been churning for over 40 years now, but still no perfect waves when it comes to concretely defining the skills we have to offer (i.e. our employability or, in reference to the field, our “value proposition”). We are clearly getting closer and now appear to have a common base to work from. Delve into this more deeply by reading the joint contribution from The Community Practitioner and Education Connection columns, which was edited by Susan Wolfe and Jim Dalton.

What to do? Help define our profession by making yourself and your work known. The more we share our backgrounds and experiences, the more we discover the many job opportunities that exist, which utilize our diverse and unique skill sets. In her column, our President, Pat O’Connor, reiterates her call for all of us to become involved in some way, if even tangentially. She provides us with a number of specific steps and suggestions. Pat even asks us to contact her directly if we are interested in increasing our participation.

Although it may seem trite as we enter 2011 to highlight the use of technological tools, such as the Web, to get the word out, we sometimes need reminders about ensuring that we take full advantage of this existing technology. In her column, Sharon Hakim describes how she has introduced community psychology to idealist.org. Our community psychology students are promoting the use of online videos to put a face and a voice onto the field. The Publications Committee, particularly Roger Mitchell and Scot Evans, are in the process of making the electronic versions of the SCRA newsletter and TCP more interactive and “user-friendly.”
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INTEREST GROUPS

AGING
The Aging Interest Group focuses on the productive role of aging in the community and the prevention of mental health problems in the elderly.
Chair: Margaret M. Hastings
(847) 256-4844
margaretmhartings@earthlink.net

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES
The Children, Youth & Families Interest Group facilitates the interests of child and adolescent development in high risk contexts, especially the effect of urban poverty and community structures on child and family development.
Chair: Richard N. Roberts (435) 797-3346

COMMUNITY ACTION
The Community Action Interest Group explores the roles and contributions of people working in applied community psychology settings.
Chair: Bradley Olson (773) 325-4771

COMMUNITY HEALTH
The Community Health Interest Group focuses on health promotion, disease prevention, and health care service delivery issues as they relate to the community.
Co-chairs: David Lounsbery (415) 338-1440 dlounsbu@aeecom.yu.edu; Shannon Gwin Mitchell (202) 719-7812 sgmwinnich@gmail.com

DISABILITIES
The Disabilities Interest Group promotes understanding of the depth and diversity of disabilities issues in the community that are ready for research and action, and influences community psychologists’ involvement in policy and practices that enhance self determination, personal choice, and full inclusion in the community for people with disabilities.
Chair: Tina Taylor-Ritzler (312) 413-4149, tritzler@uic.edu

ENVIRONMENT & JUSTICE
The Environment & Justice Interest Group focuses on environmental justice, particularly issues related to global climate change and environmental degradation. With a focus on environmental justice, particularly how environmental change affects and often perpetuates social inequality, this group explores the role community psychology can and should play in understanding these urgent changes to our ecology.
Chair: Courte Voorhees, (505) 306-7323

INDIGENOUS
The Indigenous Interest Group is hosted by the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific branch of the Society for Community Research and Action. The aims of this group are interrelated. Firstly, it wants to support SCRA members who are conducting indigenous research by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, literature and experience. This will assist the Group’s more specific focus which is to utilize our combined resources more effectively to conduct strengths-based praxis towards raising public awareness of the plight of indigenous people and addressing the social justice issues they face in oppressive dominant societies.
Co-chairs: Brian Bishop, b.bishop@curtin.edu.au; Lizzie Finn, lfinn@curtin.edu.au

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, & TRANSGENDER (LGBT)
The LGBT Interest Group increases awareness of the need for community research and action related to issues that impact LGBT people, and serves as a mechanism for communication, collaboration, and support among community psychologists who are either interested in research/service/policy related to LGBT people and communities, and/or who identify as LGBT.
Co-chairs: Richard Jenkins, jenkinsri@nida.nih.gov; Maria Valente, valent60@msu.edu

ORGANIZATION STUDIES
The Organization Studies Interest Group is a community of scholars who are interested in community psychology themes (e.g., empowerment, ecological analysis, prevention, sense of community) in organizational contexts, and in importing organization studies concepts, models, theories, and methods into community psychology.
Chair: Neil Boyd (717) 512-3870

PREVENTION & PROMOTION
The Prevention & Promotion Interest Group seeks to enhance development of prevention and promotion research, foster active dialogue about critical conceptual and methodological action and implementation issues, and promote rapid dissemination and discussion of new developments and findings in the field.
Co-chairs: Monica Adams, madams@depaul.edu; Derek Griffith, derekgm@umich.edu

RURAL
The Rural Interest Group is dedicated to highlighting issues of the rural environment that are important in psychological research, service, and teaching.
Chair: Cicile Lardon, (909) 474-5781
c.lardon@uaf.edu

SCHOOL INTERVENTION
The School Intervention Interest Group addresses theories, methods, knowledge base, and setting factors pertaining to prevention and health promotion in school.
Co-chairs: Paul Flaspohler, flaspohan@muohio.edu; Melissa Maras, marasme@missouri.edu

SELF-HELP/MUTUAL SUPPORT
The Self-Help/Mutual Support Interest Group is an international organization of researchers, self-help leaders, and policy makers that promotes research and action related to self-help groups and organizations.
Chair: Louis Brown, lbd12@psu.edu
As graduate students of social-community psychology and participants in the strike, we were very interested in community-group and psycho-political processes as analytical aspects of social change.

This past fall, SCRA entered into an organizational level partnership with Idealist.org, centered around graduate education for the public good. Idealist.org is an interactive website sponsored by the non-profit “Action without Borders,” which is aimed at helping people connect, share ideas, and learn, all in the name of “building a better world.” Community activists across the globe use it as a “go to” guide for action; social justice oriented people rely on Idealist to be an up-to-date resource for meaningful graduate school and training opportunities; job-seekers consistently turn to the site’s built-in search engine to locate available positions in the non-profit world.

Recognizing that this site would be a great venue to spread the word about our field, I set out to make sure that the Idealist organization not only knew about Community Psychology and recognized our two organizations’ overlapping values and missions, but that they passed the message on -- that we are a great graduate degree option for students who want to work with communities to bring about positive changes.

With encouragement, information and support from SCRA’s Practice Council, an overview of Community Psychology was written and posted to the section of Idealist.org dedicated to graduate school options. There, opportunities for graduate education in our field and possible career paths are now represented alongside others such as “Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies,” “Public Interest Law” and “Public Health.”

Next, guided by leadership from the Council of Education Programs (CEP), SCRA entered into an official partnership with Idealist.org as a sponsor of their national graduate school fair series which highlights “Graduate Degrees for the Public Good.” This past fall, the CEP, which will be maintaining this organizational partnership, sent representatives to four Idealist Graduate Fairs in Chicago, Ann Arbor, Atlanta and Los Angeles. At these fairs, we spoke to prospective students about our field, disseminated information about graduate school options, and made the SCRA brand visible to a new audience. Next year SCRA intends to send representatives to twenty fairs around the United States. In order to reach as many potential newcomers as possible, the CEP will need help from all of you - students and professionals alike - to staff tables at these fairs and share your experiences as community psychologists. Recruitment announcements securing volunteers to represent us during the 2011 Idealist Graduate Fairs will be sent out by the CEP in late Spring via the general SCRA listserv as well as the SCRA website.

We hope the SCRA-Idealist relationship will grow beyond this education-related connection. Our field can contribute many ideas and processes to Idealist users. Idealist has a vibrant, diverse and action-oriented community that can help us achieve our goal of “giving psychology away” - putting research-based tools in the hands of people already engaging in community work.

For more information about Idealist or the graduate education fairs we will be visiting, see: http://idealista.org/gradfairs.

SCRA often acknowledges that our work overlaps with other fields, but how often do we take advantage of our common values? Forming organizational...
level partnerships will not only allow us to reach more people, but it will enhance the work that we all do. Often times, organizations seem too big to be open to collaboration. The challenge in these cases is to think horizontally - then reach out horizontally - in any small way possible. The process of partnering with Idealist.org can serve as a model (and impetus) for creating partnerships with other like-minded organizations.

Book Review

Edited by David S. Jackson, Associate Editor

Developing Prosocial Communities Across Cultures
Forrest B Tyler
Written by Gauri Saxena, George Washington University, Washington D.C.

Over the course of seven chapters, Tyler not only strives to illustrate the benefits of prosocial communities, he attempts to convince the reader of their necessity to human survival and growth. Using examples and case studies from his work around the globe, the author uses first-hand experience to outline the trials and tribulations of developing and sustaining prosocial communities. He also uses case studies to examine projects that are not quite prosocial in nature and describes their shortcomings – without discrediting their importance. A skillful blend of research, personal experience, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, Tyler convincingly and optimistically calls for a radical change in psychosocial research and work.

Chapter 1 defines terms and explains background. He defines a prosocial community as “one in which everyone is committed to working together for their own well-being, each other’s well-being, and that of the community, the society, and ultimately the world.” (Tyler, 2007, p. 6). Clearly, prosocial community building has no small aims; in fact, the remainder of the chapter and book stresses the importance of such lofty goals. Another theme introduced in this chapter, which is common throughout, is that of sustainability. He continues to explain the core ingredients in successful prosocial communities, including freedom, unifying functions, complexity, the community’s requirements, human dignity, and individual prosocial morality. Of these, the most striking was “unifying functions”; it seems crucial to maximize commonalities between community members in order to successfully create such communities. Yet most psychological research focuses on differences rather than similarities; clearly, a shift must be made in order to fit this paradigm. The final section of the chapter builds momentum, creating an excited, optimistic energy.

Chapter 2 describes a “two-faceted interlocking framework” (Tyler, 2007, p.17): the organization of individuals in their personal space and individuals within communities, and the transactional nature of the two. After briefly describing these models, the author provides a charming set of fictional characters through whom he illustrates the finer points of these models. While the characters are complex and removed from cliché, at times the concepts Tyler attempts to explain seem oversimplified. For example, when discussing self-efficacy he states that the individual with higher social status will have a greater sense of self efficacy, while the individual with lower social status will have less self-efficacy. This statement deters from the rich complexity with which he described other aspects of these characters; indeed, this statement ignored many basic tenets of social psychology and other factors about the characters. Tyler also introduces the idea of a “community of one” in which each person has a “unique transcultural framework” (Tyler, 2007, p. 36).

Chapter 3 explains the current state of affairs regarding psychologists’ approach to change. Tyler begins by explaining his own philosophy, which essentially lies in the importance not of eliminating negative experiences, but of striking a balance and living all emotions/experiences. Thus, the key to positive mental health lies in coping styles and hopelessness, as well as in recognizing the role of context in shaping and sustaining an individual’s mental health. He goes on to critique different approaches to mental health and their limitations and shortcomings, such as too much focus on individuals, not enough focus on a broader goal of overarching social change, etc. While his critique is fair, one must recognize that these approaches do have their place, depending on the goal and nature of the problem a researcher wishes to study. For example, someone suffering with depression may well benefit from a prosocial community, but will also benefit from tackling depression at an individual level and coping within the limits of the community. As Tyler states, we are all communities of one – and for this reason, we cannot negate the experience and importance of the individual.

Chapter 4 explains the different levels
of change possible, including individual, systemic (i.e., changes within an existing framework), and creating an alternative setting altogether (i.e., breaking out of any traditional framework). Tyler’s attitude toward the first two seems to be that they are legitimate in their own way, but not enough for meaningful, sustainable change. Here, he addresses some of my critique of chapter 3, by giving legitimacy to such levels of change in that they are meaningful to a degree – just not as meaningful as more radical change. Tyler stresses the importance of integration and interconnectedness. He also describes a non-prosocial community, namely the American Psychological Association (APA), in great length. His frustration with the APA is quite apparent. He believes that

Through case examples from around the globe, Tyler illustrates the cross cultural and transcultural nature of such work.

people in positions of influence/power in the APA have the ability to change the framework of what type of causes and research are worth pursuing – yet they are not willing to do so. Instead of focusing on the third level of change – to Tyler, the most important – they insist on focusing almost exclusively on the first two. This chapter provides interesting reflections on a non-prosocial community. One cannot help but wonder: How might Tyler use this as an example to improve this community and make it more prosocial? Is it possible to make every community prosocial, especially when members have such varying agendas, goals, and frameworks?

Chapter 5 describes a number of case studies; some are prosocial in nature, others not. While reading these examples, it becomes clear that creating prosocial communities is not a mere research project for this author, but rather a whole way of living and approaching the world. He contrasts researchers “detached” involvement in a non-prosocial study versus the extremely involved participation of members of a prosocial project, in which staff even contributed “free time” to their work. This consuming nature, which seems so essential to prosocial communities, could be intimidating and/or unappealing to some. Furthermore, another shortcoming is the vast time and resources necessary to create such communities; for a junior academic researcher on a tenure track, these types of projects may not be feasible. However, it is clear that such involvement and integration are necessary for the type of broad sweeping changes Tyler advocates throughout the book. This chapter also highlights the difficulty of sustaining such communities – which seems to be the true challenge for any research advocating lasting societal changes.

After providing background, creating a case for prosocial community development, and providing detailed examples of the benefits of such communities, Tyler finally outlines steps for creating and sustaining them. He provides a very action-oriented framework. As the reader, I welcomed such an outline and appreciated that he provided steps towards creating meaningful solutions. Although it was overwhelming, it was also empowering, which is what so many theories lack. He describes this framework in an urgent, insistent tone. This tone, however, did not feel inappropriate; at this point I was convinced of these communities’ potential to contribute to sweeping change and growth. Even though I was aware of the challenges, I felt optimistic.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by offering a detailed description and analysis of a fully successful prosocial community. It is important to note, however, that this community is not fictional (Tyler was involved in its development) and is still growing and changing.

Overall, Tyler convincingly presents
Disabilities Action

Edited by Tina Taylor-Ritzler

Promoting Sexual Citizenship and Self-Advocacy for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: The Sexuality and Disability Consortium

Written by Benjamin Graham 1,2, Tia Nelis 1, Linda Sandman 1, Katie Arnold 1, & Sarah Parker 1
1University of Illinois at Chicago
2DePaul University

Introduction

Many people with disabilities experience profound marginalization in multiple human rights domains, including disparities in sexual and reproductive health. According to Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with disabilities should have the same range, quality and standard of health services as provided to other persons (United Nations, 2008). While the United States has a strong tradition of disability rights, existing policies and practices around sexual and reproductive health for people with disabilities remain inadequate, underfunded and under-researched (Ward, Trigler, & Pfeiffer, 2001). This is certainly true for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Sexual citizenship is a concept that emerged within gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) theories in the 1990’s (Evans, 1993; Richardson, 2000). It offers a lens for examining diverse experiences of marginalized sexual status by bridging the public (citizenship) and private (sex/intimacy) spheres, and by examining the way social structures include, exclude and regulate sexual behavior and identity. Sexual citizenship theories can help situate our understanding of marginalized sexuality within an ecological perspective, and also inform interventions to promote social justice and sexual health. This article begins with an overview of some of the needs and forms of marginalization that exist for people with I/DD in regard to sexual health. We then discuss the concept of sexual citizenship, highlighting examples and implications for the marginalized experiences of adults with I/DD. Lastly, we describe a university-based disability and sexuality consortium working to address sexual citizenship and self-advocacy for adults with I/DD.

Current Needs

Contemporary national, state, and local guidelines/policies that address sexuality among people with disabilities have been criticized as focusing primarily on responding to crises, or existing solely to protect individuals from abuse (Shildrick, 2007; Wacker, Parish, & Macy, 2008). Furthermore, people with disabilities are often viewed as asexual or incapable of having a fulfilling sexual life (Galvin, 2006). This is especially true for high risk groups such as people with I/DD. This is part of a broader socio-cultural and political problem where the sexuality of people with disabilities, and in particular people with I/DD, is highly marginalized. The problem is compounded by a lack of education, information and knowledge about sexuality and disability, with many service providers, families, and legal guardians unaware of how to respond when issues arise (Ailey, Mark, Crisp, & Hahn, 2003; O’Callaghan & Murphy, 2007). Furthermore, educational and training resources are often inaccessible, which can place people with I/DD at even higher risk for sexual abuse, sexually transmitted disease, and unplanned pregnancy.

Sexual Citizenship and I/DD

Previous theoretical writing on sexual citizenship focused primarily on GLBTQ experiences of marginalized sexuality, with many service providers, families, and legal guardians unaware of how to respond when issues arise (Ailey, Mark, Crisp, & Hahn, 2003; O’Callaghan & Murphy, 2007). Furthermore, educational and training resources are often inaccessible, which can place people with I/DD at

While the United States has a strong tradition of disability rights, existing policies and practices around sexual and reproductive health for people with disabilities remain inadequate, underfunded and under-researched
disabilities take for granted, and directly impacts the ability of many people with I/DD to express their sexuality.

In the context of sexual citizenship, embodiment refers to legal and professional regulation of the body in regards to the sexuality of certain groups (e.g., sodomy laws, the medical regulation of sex reassignment). A high-profile example of these issues for people with I/DD is the case of Ashley X, where the parents of a young woman with I/DD chose for her to have several highly invasive medical procedures to keep her physically small, in part under the justification that by doing so she would be less likely to be sexually victimized (Kirschner, Brashler, & Savage, 2007).

Institutional inclusion refers to the way social institutions control access to and regulate participation within them (e.g., the right to marry, the right to openly serve in the military). Courts and organizations serving adults with I/DD have long struggled with the complex legal and ethical issues around sexual consent among adults with I/DD (Kennedy & Niederbuhl, 2001; Lyden, 2007). Even if sexual consent capacity underscores the power of institutions to regulate sexual citizenship among people with I/DD.

Lastly, spatial themes refer to geographic features affecting marginalized sexual status, such as urban vs. rural, different norms based on which part of a city a person is in, or the granting of private space. Residential homes in which many adults with I/DD live set firm policies for appropriate sexual behavior and, while most strive to be empowering in their approach, many fall into the larger societal pattern of treating I/DD sexuality as either not present or primarily in need of protection in regard to where it can be expressed, if anywhere (Swango-Wilson, 2008).

The examples above highlight the ways in which sexual citizenship can provide a theoretical lens for understanding “the discourses and practices of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, and the many shades in between” (Cosman, 2008) as they apply to adults with I/DD. A direct strategy for addressing the issues outlined above is enabling active participation and self-advocacy among marginalized groups. The next section provides a case illustration of this approach.

**The Sexuality and Disability Consortium at the University of Illinois at Chicago**

The Sexuality and Disability Consortium (SDC) began in November of 2008 in response to an expressed need in the disability community to better address the marginalization of people with disabilities in regards to sexuality. Since its beginning, SDC has grown as a collaboration of self-advocates, faculty, clinicians, community educators, researchers, and graduate students from the Institute on Disability & Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois’ University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. The mission of the SDC is to provide research, advocacy, training and education to support people with disabilities to enhance healthy sexuality and relationships. The SDC’s primary goal is to promote best practice approaches for people with disabilities, families, professionals and policymakers, with a focus on people with I/DD. For more information visit: www.idhd.org/SDC.html.

The SDC is a model of valuing the person with disabilities as the expert teacher and reframing the traditional view where people with disabilities have been excluded from being the recipients of sexuality education. At our philosophical core is the promotion of sexual self-advocacy, a concrete strategy for facilitating empowerment and sexual citizenship among people with I/DD. In this context, sexual self-advocacy involves individuals using their own voices to communicate their needs, including their need for education and the ability to make personal choices (Hingsburger & Tough, 2002). It is derived from the concept of self-advocacy, articulated in the mission statement of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), a national self-advocacy organization run by and for adults with I/DD:

“We believe that all people with disabilities are treated as equals and that they are given the same decisions, choices, rights, responsibilities, and chances to speak up and empower themselves; opportunities to make new friends and to learn from their mistakes.” (SABE, 2010)

In practical application, sexual self-advocacy serves as a necessary tool for addressing sexual citizenship issues by rethinking barriers created by social institutions and dismantling oppressive attitudinal barriers (Hingsburger, 1995; O’Callaghan & Murphy, 2007). Working with local organizations serving adults with I/DD as well as statewide I/DD organizations, the SDC has promoted change at individual and institutional levels. The SDC has offered trainings on the topics of Healthy Sexuality and Sexual Self-Advocacy to a variety of community groups, as well as at statewide conferences. People with I/DD, their families and
professionals have all participated in these trainings. A major focus has been exploring the realities behind myths and misperceptions about the sexuality of persons with I/DD. The trainings also introduce the concept of sexual self-advocacy, incorporating ways to include the concept into one’s own work.

Consistent with the philosophy of sexual self-advocacy, all curricula and related materials used by the SDC are informed by and grounded in self-advocacy. This has been done through the inclusion of self-advocates in prioritizing and describing issues regarding sex and intimacy. The consortium utilizes resources developed by and with people with I/DD, including self-advocate authored materials from The Riot!, a self-advocate e-newsletter (http://www2.hsri.org/leaders/theriot/) and Doin’ It: Sex, Disability, and Videotape, a film on disability sexuality created by The Empowered FeFes, a self-advocate organization of young women with disabilities (http://www.alouthinfo.org/The_Empowered_Fe_Fes.html). Green Mountain Self-Advocates is a Vermont-based self-advocacy organization (www.gmsavt.org/) that has developed user-friendly, accessible materials on sexual self-advocacy which has been used in SDC trainings. These resources include self-advocate defined goals for healthy relationships, such as “Feeling good about yourself, knowing your rights and responsibilities when in a relationship, feeling free to speak to your partner and tell them what you want and don’t want in a relationship, and getting detailed information about sex that everyone can understand” (Green Mountain Self-Advocates, 2010).

In an effort to address the need expressed by the disability community for more resources, the SDC sponsored a two day training event “Becoming a Sexuality Educator” led by a national expert in the field, Katherine McLaughlin (www.disabilityworkshops.com). As part of promoting institutional change, all partner organizations were required to attend as a dyad consisting of one adult member with an I/DD (self-advocate) and one direct service professional. Twenty dyad teams (40 people total) were trained to implement a sex education curriculum in their agencies, following the train-the-trainer model published by Green Mountain Self-Advocates and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. A six-month follow-up meeting was held at UIC to review the successes and challenges of implementing the curriculum. As an additional component of promoting institutional change, the SDC offered consultation services to organizations seeking to implement new curricula and organizational policies around sexual health.

SDC training activities, typically conducted by SDC members with and without I/DD, help facilitate a process where self-advocates in attendance identify needs, learn about resources, and raise awareness about how to advocate for their rights around sexual citizenship. At the 2010 Speak Up, Speak Out Summit, a recent statewide self-advocacy conference for adults with I/DD, self-advocates in a breakout session on sexual self-advocacy facilitated by the SDC created a set of recommended action steps that adults with I/DD can apply in their lives:

1. Knowing when to say “No”
2. Have respect
3. Find out about protection
4. Speak up and say “Stop”
5. Support others
6. Talk about decisions
7. Get educated!
8. Find out about training on sexuality
9. Figure out when to tell your parents about what you want
10. Practice what you want to say in Self-Advocacy group

In addition to training, consultation, and advocacy, the SDC strives to further research in the area of sexual self-advocacy and health. Situated within a national research center on disability, we have applied for and are actively pursuing research and evaluation grants to further participatory research projects. Additionally, we seek to advance theory in the area of disability sexuality and to provide opportunities for new researchers and practitioners to learn about disability sexuality.

Challenges and Future Opportunities

In addition to our successes, the work in the SDC has helped us better understand the unique challenges of addressing sexual health for adults with I/DD from a self-advocacy perspective. An overarching lesson within these challenges is that the very structures that contribute to marginalized sexual citizenship play out in the work of those who strive to redress them. For example, in our sexual self-advocacy training, not all organizations understood or were willing to honor the requirement that an adult with I/DD be part of the organizational representation; in some cases this reduced the total number of organizations who took part. In addition, research funding sources specific to disability sexuality are rare to nonexistent, with many grant opportunities competing within the
breadth of general disability or human sexuality topics. Lastly, creating harmony between the cultures of self-advocacy and academia, we have learned and continue to learn, is both a challenge and a reward.

People with I/DD have become increasingly outspoken about the need and right for education and validation in the pursuit of intimacy and sexual expression. Disability supports, advocates, and researchers can help advance these goals by working with self-advocates to promote evidence-based, user-informed curriculum, address organizational change, and conduct participatory research on the intersection of disability and sexuality. University-based consortiums are one way of building infrastructure for beginning the sizeable task of promoting inclusive sexual citizenship for adults with I/DD.

References


It’s 30 Years Later. Where Are We?

In a 1979 TCP article Ray Lorion asked, “Where is Community Psychology in terms of professional development? Is Community Psychology ready to define training program criteria?” The Community Practitioner and Education Connection columns have teamed up to revisit this issue 30 years later. Tom Wolff (this issue) revisited this column and wrote a commentary. We sent his commentary to 8 community psychologists and asked them to write brief commentaries on Tom’s comments and the issue in general. They included practitioners, faculty, students, and Ray Lorion himself. We asked them to address one or all of the following questions:

• Is this a problem? If yes, what are the solutions?

• What are your thoughts about what each academic program must do? And what SCRA must do?

• What are your thoughts about unified standards?

• How do we create a recognized profession of “community psychologist” with the accompanying marketplace?

We are interested in your comments on this column. You can post them on the new SCRA Practice Council blog at http://communitypsychologypractice.blogspot.com.

Developing the Profession of Community Psychology Practitioner

Written by Tom Wolff, Tom Wolff and Associates

In reviewing the TCP from 1979 and reading Ray Lorion’s remarks reprinted below it is clear that we have made little progress in more than 30 years on the issue of developing the profession, and training community psychologists for practice.

Ray Lorion (1979) wrote the following:

Where is community psychology in terms of professional development?

Is Community Psychology ready to define training program criteria?

“Regardless of the outcome of the debate on the National Commission, the Division must, at some point, decide whether or not a particular education program constitutes a reasonable graduate-level experience in the area of community psychology. There are several; relatively immediate reasons for doing so. There are at least 60 programs nationwide currently involved in training graduate level community psychologists. The extent to which there is any consistency in the basic skills acquired by the graduates of these programs (or at least, I assume, by that subset who call themselves “community psychologists”) is presently unknown. Assessment of the extent of the overlap across programs should be of the first tasks assumed by the newly formed Council of Community Psychology Program Directors. Is it elitist to expect that those who share a particular professional title or training goal do not also share certain skills and training procedures? Should the applicants to these training programs have any formal basis by which to compare the programs in terms of educational means and ends? Should potential employers be able to assume that a graduate program’s avowed discipline relates in any direct way to a particular set of skills or expertise? I believe the crux of the matter is whether community psychology is a profession and specific discipline within psychology or simply an interest area. If the former is the case, that suggests that we have a specifiable body of knowledge which can be translated via our training programs.” (p. 3-4)

In 1979 we fought off the APA’s attempt to set external standards on the field through accreditation, licensing etc. And in so doing we implicitly took on the responsibility of monitoring the quality of CP practice training ourselves. But in spite of Ray’s impassioned plea, we have NOT done it. Instead, what have we done is to create a laissez faire system that allows everyone to do exactly as they please with no oversight from the field of community psychology. (Clearly there is institutional oversight of departments – but that is different). We are stalled on this issue and have been for the last 30 years.

As it turned out, APA accreditation continued to be limited to clinical, counseling and school psychology and today APA is still not interested in expanding accreditation.

There seems to be a price to pay for our inaction and our comfort with laissez-faire – letting every program do their own “thing.” What are those prices:

In academia:

• Our programs are not growing.

• Our field is not growing.
The academic options are not growing but instead are more varied, often not in departments of psychology, and not affiliated with SCRA or the SCRA Council of Education Programs. This may spread the word but potentially dilutes the profession of community psychology. We are not any clearer for our students as to what any given program specializes in terms of areas of practice.

In practice:

- The definition of community psychology practice is still “anything that someone trained in community psychology does in a community” – this is not adequate.
- We have not created a market for our graduates – we never worked at and thus have not succeeded in creating jobs labeled for CP Practitioners.
- We have not tracked our students.
- We have lost our students’ affiliation with CP, as they connect to other fields depending on their work.
- Our values, ideas, theories, research and perspective are terrific, but our delivery is overly cautious and thus we have had minimal impact on our society and the world.

So what are we to do? What are our options? It seems that at a minimum we must demand that every program that trains community psychologists who go into practice (even part time as part of their academic work) do the following:

- Define practice for their program.
- Be transparent in describing their program’s specialty areas where students will get training and describe how they will get that training (courses, practicum, internships, etc).
- Work to create a market for their graduates who go into practice as well as academia.

Others suggest what Ray Lorion suggests above – that the field create uniform standards. So are “Unified Standards for Training” monitored by SCRA or another body the answer? What do we gain? What do we lose? If we don’t act will time catch up with us like in Australia where others from psychology licensing boards declared what is and is not a psychologist and created a crisis for community psychology training programs and practitioners (especially Masters level)? Can that happen here? How do we claim all of our community psychology graduates – Masters and Doctorate- who are engaged in practice and celebrate them as the exemplars of our field?

There seems to be a price to pay for our inaction and our comfort with laissez-faire – letting every program do their own “thing.”

Back to the Future Part III
Written by
William D. Neigher, Atlantic Health System, NJ
Allen W. Ratcliffe, Community Psychologist, Tacoma, WA

Let’s start this commentary with some important basic facts. Past presidents describe SCRA as “high relevance and high invisibility” and since 1983 we’ve lost two thirds of our APA members. That leaves us with roughly the same number of APA members as in our founding year of 1965. Seventy-three percent of our APA members are over 50; 20% over 70. SCRA’s vision of “…strong, global impact” remains elusive.

Currently, not all community psychologists are APA or even SCRA members, and not all would ascribe to the new vision statement. But at our current trajectory we’re likely to hear Ray and Tom’s challenge to the field again in 2041. If there’s anyone left with the interest to read about it.

All of these facts can generate opportunities for positive change, if we choose to change.

We are in general agreement with Tom, and will suggest some refinements based upon the Practice Council’s work in developing a “Value Proposition” [VP] for community psychology [The Community Psychologist, 42, No. 2]. A VP makes “the case” for a profession, based on the added value the profession brings to the competition for jobs and resources among present and future employers. It infers a “brand promise” based on the skills, competencies, and values of its members and on their ability to apply those skills consistently with expected outcomes:

“…what makes community psychologists distinctive is that we apply well-established psychological principles and techniques, tested and proven in practice, to improve well-being and effectiveness at individual, organizational, and community levels. We do so with an explicit concern for social justice, inclusiveness and participation, the value of diversity, collaboration, prevention, and a focus on strengths” [www.scra27.org].

At the same time the development of a value proposition challenges us to question whether it is “aspirational” or truly reflects the abilities of the average professional “to deliver.” Some of those tough issues are

- What are the skills and competencies we are trained for or learn on the job?
- How much variation is there among us in our ability to perform these skills?
- How do we “certify” to employers that those who define themselves as community psychologists have those skills?
- What do current and future employers expect from us in a dynamic and changing marketplace and workforce?
• Are our training programs constantly re-evaluating those skills and re-tooling the curricula to respond to current and future need and demand?

To address these questions we conducted a survey of community psychologists using 17 skills and competencies that were defined in earlier work, first by Ray Scott (2007) and then modified slightly by Kelly Hazel and reported by Oliwier Dziadkowiec and Tiffeny Jimenez (2009).

**Findings**

Our findings suggest that academia has made progress in preparing some community psychologists for certain types of community practice. However, the VP survey data indicate that the highest priority still has been given to preparing students for research- and evaluation-related skill sets. Based on our sample of one hundred forty-six persons responding, ninety percent or more reported that academic training was available to them in:

- Ethical Professional Practice
- Locate, Evaluate and Apply Information
- Community-Based Applied Research
- Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Ecological, Systems, and Community-Level Understanding
- Professional Judgment

Sixty to seventy percent reported that academic training was available to them in:

- Organizational Assessment, Development, and Consultation
- Small and Large Group Processes

Forty to sixty percent of respondents reported that academic training was available to them in:

- Disseminating Information, Communication Skills
- Resource Development

Based upon these data it appears that community psychology students are consistently prepared to carry out community research and evaluation activities, but inconsistently prepared to carry out community implementation, collaboration, and advocacy activities.

**Discussion**

On the question of standards for graduate training programs, it makes sense that training programs voluntarily and genuinely enhance consistency and transparency across universities. The Council of Education Programs and the Practice Council are developing recommendations within a Joint Task Force which will address commonality issues.

From the perspective of CP practice skills, it should be the responsibility of academia to strengthen training in the implementation, collaboration, and advocacy skill sets. Additionally, graduate training programs are ethically responsible to communicate very clearly to student applicants what skill sets they are willing to teach, and then to teach well.

Our response in general to teaching programs: Define practice, be transparent in your program’s specialty areas, work to create a market for graduates to go into practice as well as into academia, hold yourselves accountable by following up our practice-oriented graduates and getting feedback to improve practice training, and teach well!

We must choose between the evolution of a consistent training model and the maintenance of a gaggle of graduate training programs. We don’t know whether the current dynamics among and across academic settings will facilitate or impede greater consistency among CP training programs. However, we agree with Tom that if we cannot achieve consistency of training in the community implementation, collaboration, and advocacy skill sets we risk irrelevance or extinction. If we cannot provide applicants with clear information so they can make informed choices among graduate programs, we will continue to frustrate many students who now leave after completing their Masters degree. If we cannot clearly define to potential employers what we know how to do, we will not enhance employment programs seems timely and appropriate.
opportunities for our graduates.

Recommendations

Gravitating to the “A” in SCRA we recommend these five action steps:

1. Develop a core curriculum in community psychology with 1) research and evaluation, and 2) development and intervention tracks for bachelors, masters, and doctoral level training programs; for voluntary adoption. The Council of Education Programs and the Practice Council should develop it jointly, based on the recommendations of their Joint Task Force [72110]. It should be reviewed periodically and revised based on advances in community science and current and anticipated marketplace demand from employers. Pursue strategic alliances among other academic departments to ensure a robust and dynamic curriculum.

2. Enhance transparency of training programs to clarify how the core curriculum is enabled through coursework, interdisciplinary collaboration, practicum experiences, internships, career counseling, and job placement.

3. Periodically survey graduates and professionals in the field as a collaborative effort between SCRA and training programs. Similar to the employer survey, this feedback loop can help continually adjust our training and practicum efforts to problems and opportunities in the field.

4. Develop continuing professional education (CPE) opportunities for community psychologists and other professional disciplines with similar values, as a three year pilot project. Offer CPE programs in collaboration with training programs, service organizations, other professions, and industry at the regional level and the Biennial.

5. Communicate a value proposition for our field based on demonstrated competencies, and with it create employer awareness and “brand” recognition in the public. We need to address current and future job markets and employment settings, and differentiate ourselves as professionals in a crowded applicant pool.

Thirty years ago Ray Lorion asked if community psychology is a profession or just an area of interest. If we don’t successfully address the issues we’ve described here we run the very real risk of being neither.

Three Steps for Graduate Training Programs to Strengthen Their Role in Developing Unified Standards in Community Psychology Education

Written by Gregor V. Sarkisian & Sylvie Taylor, Antioch University, Los Angeles

Over three decades ago, members of SCRA were debating whether uniform standards should be developed for training programs in Community Psychology (CP). In a piece for the Division of Community Psychology Newsletter in which the issue was debated, Ray Lorion suggested that if CP is to be more than a mere interest area, rising to the level of profession or specific discipline, then we must develop, “a specifiable body of knowledge which can be translated via our training programs” (Lorion, 1979, p. 4).

As educators of community psychology practice, we welcome the idea of unified standards for training.

we need to address current and future job markets and employment settings, and differentiate ourselves as professionals in a crowded applicant pool.

of training. Our goal in this paper is to share what we have learned in evaluating our M.A. level specialization in Applied Community Psychology and to present suggestions to better understand the current state of training, and, to inform the development of unified standards.

Step 1: Commitment to Transparency and Development within Training Programs

Directors must first commit to being transparent about the processes and outcomes of their training programs. Depending on the context of the program and institution, there will likely be some level of transparency from which to build a plan to assess one’s program. This will likely involve studying the current connection of program goals to both department and university goals. Simultaneously, examination of the inner workings of a program can be studied through program self-evaluation. Even though the field has not articulated universal standards, setting up an ongoing framework to evaluate program practices will provide an infrastructure which can easily be modified to include universal standards once they are developed.

Step 2: Program Self-Evaluation

Comprehensive program review is an effective tool for assessing how programs train their students for CP practice. Curriculum mapping is one of the most powerful tools for self-studies. The development of a curriculum map provides an integrated view of the program goals, student learning objectives and outcomes, pedagogical practices used to achieve them, and how each goal, objective, and outcome is manifested in each course. This approach allows faculty to identify strengths as well as gaps that exist within a given program of study at multiple levels, from individual courses, practica, thesis development, to the program as a whole.

Step 3: Dissemination of Findings to Programs, the Council of Education Programs (CEP) and SCRA

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Sharing findings from program reviews can be beneficial in several ways: (1) programs can benefit from learning about the practices of others and adopting pedagogical approaches, syllabi contents, or course projects to strengthen their training programs; (2) the CEP can serve as a hub to share information between programs and SCRA; and, (3) the field can utilize program information related to competencies and exemplary teaching practices to develop unified standards.

If programs could achieve these three steps in collaboration with other programs, the CEP and SCRA, the field would be in a better position to work toward unified standards:

**Step 4: Develop Core Competencies in Practice and Research**

**Step 5: Develop and Communicate Effective Pedagogy in Training Core Competencies to Programs**

**Step 6: Develop Unified Standards in Community Psychology Training**

While there are a host of barriers to achieving these final steps, we are truly lucky. We are community psychologists. We are strengths-based, inclusive, committed to accountability and have respect for diversity. All values we espouse to our students and that will need to be enacted by us to engage in a multi-step (multiyear) process to develop universal standards.

As third year students in a doctoral community psychology program, we have a great deal invested in this discussion. Each of us came to community psychology over three years ago from a variety of fields, with previous degrees in Psychology, Leadership, Social Work, and Public Administration. By the end of the next academic year, each of us will leave our University behind and apply for jobs as community psychologists. Thus, Tom Wolff’s assertion that “we have not created a market for our graduates” is more than a bit disconcerting and leaves us very interested in the ultimate outcome of this discussion.

As current students in a community psychology doctoral program, we believe that it is time for community psychologists to become unified as a profession. This does not mean that we lose autonomy, but rather, that we all have the same basic foundation to build upon and make our own. We propose that such a foundation should include, at minimum, documentation of transparent guidelines regarding the core values, ethics, competencies and skills of a community psychologist.

We understand what community psychology represents, but potential employers often do not. We need the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) to clearly communicate who a community psychologist is and what a community psychologist does. At the same time, the thought of “accreditation,” and what it could mean in terms of a loss of freedom and flexibility, makes us fearful of standardization. However, a set of guidelines should not be confused with standardization or accreditation of community psychology. Guidelines serve to propagate core values, ethics, competencies, and skills monitored by an organized body such as SCRA. The framework of community psychology programs would align with a set of guidelines used as building blocks to design each program’s unique specialization.

Flexibility must be allowed for each graduate education program. Programs need the freedom to build upon their strengths. The unique programs are invaluable to students who are choosing a graduate program based upon career goals. Along with this flexibility, we feel strongly about establishing a set of overarching guidelines for community psychology. The Council of Education Programs could take the lead in establishing guidelines and engaging in a dialogue with programs about their values, competencies, and classes offered. Programs that choose to meet these guidelines would be recognized and endorsed by SCRA.

While providing academic standards is important, the effort will mean little for a field which is unknown. It is essential that efforts be taken to ensure that alumni...
Some Thoughts Supporting the Development of a Professional Community Psychology Practice

Written by David A. Julian,
Center for Learning Excellence,
The Ohio State University

The content that follows is offered in response to Tom Wolff’s “Developing the Profession of Community Psychology Practitioner” (Wolff, this issue). Tom references an article written by Ray Lorion (1979) that addresses a number of issues related to professional community psychology practice. Tom argues that we have made little progress in addressing the key issues identified by Ray and as a result have not realized the potential of community psychology as a force for promoting well-being. In Tom’s words, “Our values, ideas, theories, research and perspective are terrific but our delivery is overly cautious and thus we have had a minimal impact on our society and the world.”

It seems that the basic question Ray poses is still relevant. Ray states, “I believe the crux of the matter is whether community psychology is a profession and specific discipline in psychology or simply an interest area” (Lorion, 1979, p. 4). Members of the Community Psychology Practice Group and many others have strongly advocated for community psychology practice as a profession. So is community psychology practice a profession? A quick review of several web-based resources (Kizlik, 2010; Wikipedia, 2010) related to the “characteristics of a profession” offers some insight.

While certainly not an exhaustive review, this query generated several questions that advocates for professional practice and individual community psychology practitioners might consider:

- Does my practice of community psychology provide an essential service to society?
- Is my practice of community psychology guided by a recognized body of knowledge?
- Is my community psychology practice based on an undergirding discipline(s)?
- Are there performance standards that can be applied to my work as a community psychology practitioner?
- Am I, as a community psychology practitioner, accountable for specific competencies?

I answered each of these questions in the affirmative. I believe my work as a professional community psychology practitioner provides an essential service to the constituencies I represent. My work is guided by a body of knowledge that is readily accessible and my training in community psychology undergirds my practice. I can judge the quality of my practice based on performance standards that I can identify and finally, my work is based on a set of competencies that I acquired in training and over the years I have practiced community psychology.

My guess is that most individuals who define themselves as community psychology practitioners would also answer these questions in the affirmative. However, I suspect that the answer to these questions might be somewhat different from one practitioner to another. So I propose that we reframe Ray’s original question. The question is not “Are we a profession?”; it is “Do we want to be a profession?” and assuring that our training programs accommodate that collective vision.

I believe this is more opportunity than problem. My experience suggests that there is a need for individuals who are prepared to practice at the community level and that community psychologists are uniquely prepared to fill this need. Preparation of community psychology practitioners would require a recognized definition of community psychology practice and some effort to define required competencies. This would enable trainees to seek out relevant course work in psychology departments and across other disciplines. If our aim is to change conditions and promote well-being, these tasks seem like logical steps. Basic science may provide the knowledge necessary to impact society. However, little will change in the absence of trained practitioners capable of applying such knowledge.

Heeding the Call to Develop a Model of Professional Training in Community Psychology

Written by Gabriel P. Kuperminc,
Georgia State University

As a field devoted to understanding and bringing about social change, community psychology has remained remarkably static over the last 30 years, at least with regard to defining itself as a profession. The loose consensus about what constitutes training in
community psychology that Lorion described in his 1979 TCP article has remained just that. This is not to deny the many ways in which our field has evolved by debating and refining constructs such as empowerment (e.g., Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004), to playing an important role in the increasing acceptance of prevention (e.g., Weisz, Sandler, Durlak, & Anton, 2005), to adopting concepts from other fields, such as resilience (e.g., Masten, 2007) and integrating them into a community perspective. Along the way, however, we have maintained an almost reflexive distaste for organizing and articulating a coherent model of community psychology practice.

Answering Wolff’s call for defining and articulating a model of community psychology practice is within the reach of many, if not most, of our graduate programs. Moreover, recent developments, such as the recent approval of the Practice Council within SCRA, which gives practitioners of community psychology a legitimate standing within the organization on equal footing with other constituencies, are critical resources for bringing about needed changes. The close partnership that has developed between the Practice Council and the Council of Education Programs offers an avenue by which consensus on defining community psychology practice and integrating this consensus into a coherent model of graduate training can proceed. It is less clear to me, however, how formalizing such a consensus would lead to changes that would keep graduates who choose primarily practice-oriented careers in the SCRA fold. In the remainder of this commentary, I offer some reasons for moving toward defining a core set of competencies for training and provide some thoughts on how programs might begin to develop clear statements of the sort called for in Wolff’s article.

So, why do we need a universal set of core competencies?

• A loose consensus already exists on what comprises core competencies of the field; formalizing them would still allow programs wide latitude, constrained only by a responsibility to articulate their areas of strength beyond those core competencies.

• The skills and competencies for community psychology practice are not all that different from those of an academic community psychologist; though large differences likely exist in the relative emphasis placed on different competencies. We owe it as much to the future academic community psychologists as we do to the future practitioners of our field (and everything in between) to do this.

• The increasing diversity of settings in which academic training in community psychology can be found reflects increased recognition of the value of interdisciplinary work, and the recognition by disciplines outside of psychology (e.g., public health) that the community psychology perspective is valuable. We know it’s valuable and so do they; as community psychologists we should take the lead in articulating exactly what makes us who we are, rather than letting someone else do it for us.

What would a transparent statement of program specialty areas look like?

A starting point for developing a transparent statement of program specialty areas would be to consider how a training program addresses the Community Psychology Value Proposition developed by the Practice Council (Ratliff & Neigher, 2010), which offers a description of what potential employers might expect a community psychologist to be able to do. The task is to identify the ways that students in a given program may gain skills in each area of competence through required and elective coursework, community practica, and independent research or community involvement.

In GSU’s doctoral program, students gain at least introductory exposure to all of the competencies via required coursework (e.g., Introduction to Community Psychology, Research Methods, Diversity) and then gain additional exposure through coursework, practica, and independent research directed toward developing a professional specialization. Like most doctoral programs, our greatest strengths lie in the competencies related to applied research. In-depth exposure to many of the practical skills described in the Value Proposition is often left to elective coursework, practica, and students’ work in various faculty labs or independent research. Most students take at least the first semester of a two semester sequence focused on Ecological Assessment, Consultation, and Evaluation, a course that spans theory and methodology (i.e., research skills), but extends to practice-oriented skills (e.g., communicating to a lay audience, collaborating with varied stakeholders). Most students take a course on approaches to social intervention, social change, and prevention. Some areas are less well represented. For example, whereas students learn about social marketing and media-based campaigns in introductory coursework, practical experience in this area is not offered systematically; students wishing to gain this skill must seek it out by taking courses in other areas of the university, involving themselves in practica that emphasize...
those skills, etc. Our model of training puts responsibility on students (and their advisors) to make active choices in shaping their own training; of course, students will be best able to make wise choices when they have access to information about the kinds of skills they will rely upon most often in their careers. Providing this sort of information for our students remains a work in progress.

As my colleagues and I continue to refine our model of training, one of our hopes is that our graduates will continue to claim strong identities as community psychologists. However, as important as it is for graduate training programs like ours to take the steps that Wolff calls for, these efforts will be insufficient without a strong and decisive professional organization to provide a broad umbrella that includes the diversity of paths that graduates of our training pursue, and offers a professional home that a broad array of community psychologists will choose to claim throughout their careers.

I clearly recall the debates of the late 1970s and early 1980s concerning the role of community psychology within the larger discipline. I recall many of us who grew up in the sixties being pleased by our charting a course of action that we viewed as rebellious with respect to mainstream psychology. After all, we believed in the research methods of the discipline (e.g., Thomas Kuhn) and the practice methods of community organizers (e.g., Saul Alinsky). Imagine the challenge of trying to develop a certification that does equal justice to these two dimensions!

I would encourage us to again rejoice in our cross disciplinary roots. There are many perspectives to be taken when considering the impact of our discipline. When I began my training in community psychology, I had no idea I was heading toward public health. I simply realized that clinical interventions have minimal impact on population level parameters—sort of like the impact our mechanic has on our traffic problems. Our clinical colleagues, also trained 30 plus years ago may claim to have substantially assisted 10 to 12 individuals a year. Multiply that by 30 years and it remains a small number. In public health, most of us look at physicians and nurses and see the same ratios. Many individual success stories exist, but one policy change we have affected can impact millions. Again, consider the outcomes we should target.

Let us consider licensure or certification. Public health as a discipline has just two years ago implemented its first certification exam (see National Board of Public Health Examiners). We began by forcing lay providers (Promotores or community health workers—similar to the myriad of non-professionals in the “workforce” of community psychology) to become certified. This was an easy target. After all, they had so little formal training that we needed to make certain that those we target in the community are “safe” from inappropriate behavior in the field. That simple move has led to the loss of large numbers of excellent field workers who are no longer certified as eligible to work in the field. Further, many of those that remain have become more regimented and narrowly focused. Now we are targeting our masters trained students. Community psychology should watch what becomes of public health. Soon we will all be advertising our graduates’ success rates on the certification exam as a recruiting tool. This will lead to direct competition and teaching to the test. Forgotten will be the generic skills that we need in the profession. The focus will become the “professionally defined competencies” at the individual level that are reflected by the certification exam. I would agree that accreditation at the program level is a good thing. Our periodic introspective self-study exercises, while arduous, are a good thing for our training programs. But I would raise caution about individual level certification exams as a universal good. They will immediately narrow our focus, while it is our breadth of impact that is where we make our mark(s).

Many of us believe that community psychology as a discipline is at the heart of what a liberal arts education is all about. A liberal arts graduate is someone who steps out of their undergraduate training program well rounded and ready to head in a myriad of directions. One who comes through a graduate program in community psychology still obtains broad liberal arts exposure. They come with strong research skills, the capacity to reason in settings foreign to their specific training and the ability to work in cross disciplinary roots.
team settings. We should embrace this diversity of application, not question the stability of our discipline because of it.

Who cares if others view us as “elitist”? That is a sign of our worth. Who cares if we are viewed as “a profession or an internal discipline within psychology?” The fact is, other disciplines recognize the value of our training in community psychology and our skill sets by the scholarly work we produce and the outcomes we seek to alter in the communities around us. We do have a well-regarded foundation, both conceptually and empirically. Embrace the diversity.

I agree with Wolff’s concern that too many of us have left the discipline, a sentiment echoed by the Division 27 President in his spring 2009 column in TCP, but I agree with this sentiment for different reasons. I would begin by noting the degree to which those who have left the discipline have impacted other disciplines. In public health, many complain about the Masters in Public Health student who goes on to medical school as a failure of our training programs. I prefer to think that we have now made a better doctor who is aware of the distinction between primary and other forms of prevention, one who will be a much better clinician and who may yet seek to make a difference on a much larger stage than typical clinical practice provides.

Let’s remember that our discipline of community psychology grew up carrying the defiance of the sixties, making the case that we have a greater impact on the population (or community) than all the clinicians combined. Where we have failed on the health side of community psychology is not in the fact that many of us found other homes. It is that our country still spends 97 percent of our health related dollars on clinical research and services, rather than primary prevention.

Yes, we need to be more politically motivated and engaged. We need to redouble our efforts to push policy change. But we need not lament the fact that many among us have moved into different “disciplines.” Check our methods! They remain the same. We assess. We think. We develop. We organize. We build. We monitor. We evaluate. We adjust. We replicate. We push policy change. Let me restate that last point: we seek policy impact. We don’t passively wait on policy makers to come to us. They are too content to make decisions with no data whatsoever. But, the fact that we are doing all this in different settings simply makes it more difficult for us to appreciate the incredible impact that we have achieved.

It would be great if we could all join some SCRA Facebook page and regularly interact in circles we were in decades ago. The fact is we are all too busy making a difference. But we should not lament the dispersion of our skilled colleagues into other disciplines. We should invite them back for a visit!

I began my thoughts with a set of life’s metaphors. I wish to close by encouraging those actively engaged in “the profession” to stay the course. We are making a difference. Value the degrees of freedom you have protected within the discipline, whether by design or happenstance. Figure out better strategies to evaluate the impact of this dispersed set of colleagues. But more simply, “Keep on keepin’ on” (B. Dylan, Tangled up in Blue, Blood on the Tracks, Columbia Records, 1975). ☯

We should embrace this diversity of application, not question the stability of our discipline because of it.

Reflections on 30 Year Old Thoughts: Community Psychology Earned its Disciplinary Fate!

Written by Raymond P. Lorion, College of Education, Towson University

During the year in which I penned my comments for The Community Psychologist, I left a faculty position in a fairly traditional doctoral program in clinical psychology to direct an emerging doctoral program in community psychology. In doing so, I joined many like-minded clinical psychology colleagues who were also becoming involved in emerging master’s and doctoral programs partially or fully focused on the evolving discipline labeled community psychology. Prepared as traditional psycho-diagnosticians, psychotherapists and especially “scientist-practitioners,” we had also been exposed to such radical concepts as prevention, paraprofessional services, empowerment, sense of community, and therapeutic communities. Most of us were licensed mental health professionals. Many of us both delivered clinical services and prepared doctoral students with similarly traditional mental health skills. Yet, in addition to our “official” professional identity as clinical psychologists, we viewed ourselves as part of a growing movement within mental health that would leave behind theories and practices that presented many forms of psychopathology as inevitable; delayed intervention until symptoms were established; linked socioeconomic characteristics as determinants of treatment outcomes; and set impenetrable barriers to limit who could become a mental health provider and what services they could provide.

Having accepted the torch that was sort of passed on to us at the Austin Conference my generation felt some degree of responsibility to move this new and exciting discipline forward. Exactly what that meant and at what costs were only inconclusively discussed since disagreement appeared unacceptable.
and hence open debate rarely occurred. I remain convinced that our unwillingness to openly debate contentious issues limited our reach but that does not mean that our current situation would be markedly different. In some ways avoidance of such debates also allowed avoidance of limits on defining the discipline’s substantive limits and skills.

After Austin and for some time thereafter, I struggled with the challenges of maturing the discipline into a defined field of study. I believed that community psychology should prepare its students to understand social issues from a shared perspective and provide them with an identifiable set of skills that they could use to avoid, solve or repair social problems. As reflected in my earlier comments, I believed that to be a discipline, community psychology needed to agree on a set of criteria by which to decide which programs were or were not truly “community psychology” and by extension, which of their graduates had the preparation necessary to be a “community psychologist.” If we believed our discipline to be distinct from clinical psychology or other mental health professions, then wouldn’t we need to define those differences, establish procedures to confirm their presence and absence and provide “truth in advertising” assurances to those seeking to pursue careers in community psychology? My 1979 comments were intended to challenge the discipline to confront its position on its status as a unique discipline or admit that it represented an interest area for social scientists and practitioners. Whether that debate would result in accredited programs and licensure was unclear. What I hoped was that whatever the outcome, it would reflect considered decisions by those self-identifying as community psychologists.

In retrospect, I sense that the most salient phrase in my commentary was the simple question “Is it elitist to expect...?” Looking back, I sense that above all else community psychology represented opposition to the elitism that characterized mental health theory, practice and professions at the time. Across the board, each of these parameters of mental health was characterized by exclusion reflective of tradition, assumptions, and an unwillingness to consider alternatives. By contrast, community psychologists believed that those who were poor or members of minority groups or living in rural areas could benefit from service; that intervention could be time-limited, targeted to specific problems and shared with the recipient of service;

Without directly responding to my challenge, community psychology did pursue the path most appropriate for its values and its intent.

that problem development could be anticipated, avoided, interrupted and ameliorated prior to meeting diagnostic criteria; and that effective mental health services could be delivered in whole or in part by those without licensure or professional credentials. Doctoral programs in community psychology directly confronted the elitism of mental health training programs that were almost exclusively male, heterosexual, White and middle or upper class. It confronted those patterns both in terms of its admission practices and in terms of its public discussion of those very issues. Review of its leadership revealed that its changes reflected increasingly its commitment to move from exclusivity to inclusivity.

In effect, the present-day answer to my question “Is it elitist to...?” would be a resounding “Yes,” but only because we didn’t pursue the disciplinary credentials that I viewed at the time as necessary. Had we established the criteria, requirements and restrictions necessary to carve out our discipline, I wonder if our membership would look the same, ask the same questions and deliver the same services. I wonder if we would have involved ourselves as scientists or as practitioners in as broad an array of issues involving public education, public policy and public health as well as social justice, mental health service delivery, the prevention of emotional and behavioral disorders and the promotion of emotional and behavioral health. The subtitle of these comments is meant as a complement not a criticism! Without directly responding to my challenge, community psychology did pursue the path most appropriate for its values and its intent. It wanted to release mental health thinking and services from the shackles of psychoanalysis, positivism and elitism broadly spread across the delivery of human services as well as the preparation of its providers. Much like the company that states “We don’t make XXX, we simply make it better!” Community psychology can accept itself as a perspective that cannot claim exclusivity but rather in its commitment to inclusivity has made human science and human services vastly better than they were thirty years ago.

Footnotes

I say “sort of” because those who were most involved in forming the discipline were still rather young and active in its development and for decades to come would be most influential in defining what was or was not aligned with their originating viewpoints.

References for All Commentaries


Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Concerns

Edited by Richard Jenkins & Maria Valenti

Safe Zone Training: One approach in creating a positive LGBT climate at US universities

Written by Kimberly M. Avallone, Skyler Shollenbarger, and Steven R. Howe
University of Cincinnati

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1.3% of females and 2.3% of males self-identify as bisexual, and 2.8% of females and 1.8% of males self-identified as bisexual, and 3.8% of females and 3.9% of males self-identified as something other than heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual between the ages of 18 to 44 (Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005). By late adolescence, the majority of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ) individuals know and/or explore their sexual orientation (Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005). Thus, by college, sexual orientation is generally well-established.

Although research has demonstrated high risk among college students identifying as LGBTQ, not all universities and colleges in the U.S. provide programs that focus on LGBTQ support and education. Individuals identifying as LGBTQ face numerous LGBTQ-related stressors, including discrimination, violence, and harassment from a young age and these stressors continue into adulthood (Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004; Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States [SIECUS], 2001). Additionally, college students identifying as LGBTQ report increased feelings of alienation, depression, and suicidal ideation (Westefeld, Maples, Buford, & Taylor, 2001). Overall, as compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ students are at an increased risk for emotional problems, suicide, substance use, HIV risk, homelessness, harassment or discrimination, abuse, and school-related problems (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004; SIECUS, 2001). One theory that may help to explain this increased risk is syndemics, which can be defined as ‘two or more afflictions, interacting synergistically, contributing to excess burden of disease in a population’ (Center for Disease Control, as cited in Marshall, Friedman, Stall, & Thompson, 2009). Syndemic theory posits that stressors (e.g., harassment, discrimination) may play a causal role in lifetime health disparities (e.g., substance use) or other issues for which LGBTQ individuals are at an increased risk (e.g., homelessness, school-related problems; Marshall et al., 2009).

Policy Options

Creating safe spaces for LGBTQ individuals is the primary objective of Safe Zone or Ally programs, which provide skills and resources to LGBTQ advocates in order to create an affirming learning environment. In response to the need to provide safe and affirmative spaces for LGBTQ students, several universities and colleges have offered ally educational programs (Evans, 2002;
Poynter & Schroer, 1999; Tubbs, 2003). More recently, policy makers and program directors have acknowledged the impact heterosexual allies can have on creating an affirming culture on university campuses (Bullard, 2004 as cited in Poynter & Tubbs, 2008).

**Training Content**

Safe Zone or Ally programs may vary in content; however, they are united in philosophy as well as the implementation of displaying Safe Zone symbols in order to identify affirming individuals. The mission of these programs is to improve awareness and comprehension of LGBTQ issues specific to faculty, staff and students. Many programs begin with an introduction to the most common terms associated with LGBT individuals (Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele & Schaefer, 2003) and various activities sensitive to the specific needs of the campus or university. If, for instance, faculty and staff lack awareness about the particular needs of African American LGBT students, a Safe Zone or Ally program might implement a training activity to provide education on this topic. In response to evaluation feedback and having recognized that faculty and staff members have different areas of expertise and consequently, multifaceted needs, Safe Zone training at The University of Cincinnati began offering department-sensitive training. For example, specialized training is offered for the psychology department to help faculty, staff, and graduate students gain awareness about the types of issues LGBT clients may face. Tamika Odum, Program Manager at UC Women's Center, provides a brief explanation (T. Odum, personal communication, August 23, 2010) of the preparation involved in department sensitive training.

> “Here at UC, I usually send out pre-training anonymous surveys 1.5 months in advance. They have 2 weeks to complete 10 questions relating to common terminology, comfort level, LGBTQ knowledge etc. This allows me to cater to the departments’ particular needs. To my knowledge, our training program at UC is one of the only Universities offering department sensitive training.”

Funding for the program is supported solely through The University of Cincinnati Women’s Center budget. During the 2009-2010 year, they presented 17 non-solicited Safe Zone trainings.

Poynter and Tubbs (2008) outlined a general Safe Zone training program. Training at UC incorporates this general outline as well as the above mentioned department sensitive training. Poynter and Tubbs’ general outline includes an introduction of name and/or department of which participants are affiliated; as well as setting ground rules. This includes addressing maintenance of confidentiality and aims to foster respect among participants by establishing and sustaining an open sharing environment allowing everyone an equal opportunity to speak and ask questions. Other programs may want to include “Icebreaker” games during the commencement period to generate a welcoming atmosphere (Finkel et al. 2003).

Another important aspect of Safe Zone training proposed by Poynter and Tubbs (2008) is the inclusion of resources. On-campus resources where individuals can seek counseling, report harassment, or join a student organization should be provided. Local community resources may also be integrated. In addition to resources, education on common terms may be incorporated into the program in order to educate participants on LGBTQ culture. If questions regarding terminology arise, the facilitators should permit an open discussion.

Poynter and Tubbs (2008) then offer the inclusion of LGBTQ Development Theory in conjunction with Ally/Majority Development Theory. In brief, this allows participants to form a comprehensive understanding of unique obstacles/needs faced by LGBT people as well as acknowledgement of various life stages that may be affecting their specific needs. Moreover, supplementing this section with the Riddle Homophobia Scale (Riddle, 1996 as cited in Poynter & Tubbs, 2008) will permit personal examination of homophobia. Finally, role-playing, case study examination, or Video Scenarios accompanied with discussion will afford participants the opportunity for more applied LGBTQ training. The total time to participate in Safe Zone training may vary. However, at The University of Cincinnati, the process is anywhere from 1.5 hours to 4 hours (2 hours for 2 days). At the completion of training, participants have the option to sign a contract and become a Safe Zone Ally. Contracts vary for each institution offering the training; however, by signing the contract, participants declare their space/office as a safe place for students that may identify as LGBTQ. After signing the contract, participants receive a Safe Zone sticker or sign to display in their work spaces. The symbol indicates that that individual has received training and may offer support, referrals, and a “safe” place for LGBT individuals. Displaying recognizable symbols, such as pink triangle or rainbow stickers, or having affirming literature in offices or waiting areas seems to be an effective method for communicating acceptance for LGBTQ youth and may increase support for LGBTQ individuals (Phillips, McMillen, Sparks, & Uberle, 1997). Safe Zone training may be beneficial for participants even if they do not wish to become an ally because at the completion of training, they will have gained knowledge about LGBTQ culture. Accordingly, this may help to reduce a “non-safe” climate since, as demonstrated by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), inter-
group contact can lead to a reduction in prejudiced attitudes. Non-committal participants also have the option of signing the contract in the future.

Research suggests that after formalized Safe Zone training participants report more positive attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, positive behavioral changes (as evidenced by verbalized intent to engage in LGBT-affirmative actions), and demonstrate a greater level of LGBT knowledge, more supportive LGBT civil rights attitudes, greater degree of internalized affirmativeness, and less interpersonal religious conflict (Finkel et al. 2003; Scher, 2008). These programs may prove beneficial to both LGBT and non-LGBT groups by invalidating internalized stereotypes (Boulden, 2004). More specifically, Boulden used self report measures and found a significant increase in participants’ comfort interacting with people they just met that have different sexual orientations, understanding of LGBT people, respect for LGBT identified people, effect of oppression on LGBT people, and negative effect of oppression on the community. Collectively, results regarding the effectiveness of Safe Zone training (or the equivalent) support a heightened level of LGBT affirmative attitudes and behaviors.

Collectively, results regarding the effectiveness of Safe Zone training (or the equivalent) support a heightened level of LGBT affirmative attitudes and behaviors.

Policy Recommendation

Relatively few health or diversity related educational opportunities offer training on sexual orientation and gender identity making it difficult to combat heterosexism (Boulden, 2004). Given the reduced level of support for and problems faced by LGBTQ youth, there is a critical need for programs targeting education and support. Further, because Safe Zone training programs and their equivalent have been found to effectively increase knowledge, positive attitudes, and “safe” spaces for LGBTQ individuals, and because research indicates that problems for LGBTQ individuals often arise in adolescence, these programs should be implemented where contact with youth occurs. Eradicating heterosexism and homophobia can be beneficial in creating a climate that welcomes diversity and may reduce the increased risk LGBTQ youth face for various health, academic, behavioral, and psychological stigma-related problems.

If you are interested in starting an Ally program at your school, visit these helpful websites for more information:
- http://www.lgbtcampus.org/
- http://www.campuspride.org/
- www.glsen.org/

Author Notes

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References


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**Living Community Psychology**

*Edited and Written by Gloria Levin, Glorialevin@verizon.net*

“Living Community Psychology” highlights a community psychologist through an in-depth interview that is intended to depict both personal and professional aspects of the featured individual. The intent is to personalize Community Psychology (CP) as it is lived by its diverse practitioners. For this installment, we feature a leader of the international movement of CP, who was interviewed for this column at the June 2010 Third International CP Conference in Puebla, Mexico. Dr. Maritza Montero, a political/community psychologist from Venezuela, is a leader in the Latin American and international CP movements.

**Featuring:**

**Maritza Montero, Ph.D.**

*Professor Emeritus Central University of Venezuela Caracas, Venezuela Itsamon@gmail.com*

Maritza Montero has lived most of her life in Caracas, the capital city of Venezuela. Her family line includes many generations of lawyers, extending back to the 19th century. Her grandfather sat on the Supreme Court of Venezuela, and both her father and mother were lawyers. Maritza’s mother first worked as a legal secretary to help her husband become a lawyer. Maritza’s father did not like the legal profession, but her mother was passionate about the law and, after her daughters were grown, she herself became a lawyer. Her mother was a very strong person who exerted great influence in the family. Her parents divorced when Maritza was seven years old. Her mother was beautiful and had many suitors after her divorce, but she continued to self-identify as the wife of her ex-husband. Although Maritza’s father was somewhat detached from the family, late in his life he confided in Maritza that she was his beloved child – “it was very important for me to know this,” she acknowledges.

Maritza received her early education from nuns, but she remembers her schooling as a bad experience. “I was raised as a Catholic but, despite my best efforts, I would never win a piety award,” she admits. Because she received poor marks in math, she grew to detest that subject and did not do as well as desired in physics and chemistry either. She excelled in her other studies, however.

After graduating from high school, she considered studying psychology, but her mother dissuaded her, saying she did not need a degree to learn about psychology, which is better learned through living. Instead, following her family heritage, Maritza studied law at Caracas’ Catholic University, where she received excellent grades. There, she met her future husband, José Rafael Lovera, a fellow law student who was a year ahead of her in school. José is both an attorney and an historian, a member of the national Academy of History, now retired from his academic career.

Upon Maritza’s graduation from law school, her mother gave her a treasured ring, referred clients to her and recommended her for a career track program that could lead to an eventual judgeship for Maritza. Although she practiced law for two years, Maritza soon recognized that a legal career was not for her. She was more interested in the psychological problems of her clients than in the legal aspects of their cases; plus, she hated going to court. With her husband’s encouragement, she decided to leave law and study psychology.

Maritza matriculated at the Central University (founded in 1724, the alma
mater of many famous persons and with 70,000 current students) to study psychology which she came to love, finding clinical psychology especially fascinating. She later became enamored with social psychology “because it studies how society affects people and how people shape a society, with both positive and negative effects.”

At the Central University, Maritza was greatly influenced by a philosophy professor, Eduardo Vásquez, who became a mentor to her. His course surveyed the contributions of ancient and contemporary philosophers, focusing on the issue of identity. (The insights learned from him eventually were the basis of her second book, written years later, on national identity.)

She lost her long-standing fear of math while studying psychology, especially experimental psychology with Professor Eduardo Santoro, a methodological perfectionist. “I learned that math can be fascinating and that prime numbers are mysterious. Statistics became easy for me, including qualitative mathematics.” Maritza was a social psychology teaching assistant (a preparadora), from her third to her fifth years of her psychology studies, teaching the methodology part of the professor’s course. After 5 years of study, she earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology.

She joined the Institute of Psychology, invited by its director, Alberto Merani, a famous developmental psychologist in Latin America. Eventually promoted to the instructor level (“but still the lowest academic rank”), her first research project concerned political attitudes, and specifically, voting behavior. Her research departed from the traditional polling research by asking why people vote as they do (rather than for whom they vote). She emphasized qualities people seek in presidential candidates. Using “a beautiful sample of the Caracas population, created by three statistics professors,” she was assisted in conducting the field research by thirty enthusiastic students. The study results

She later became enamored with social psychology “because it studies how society affects people and how people shape a society, with both positive and negative effects.”

School of Sociology at Central University offered her a job teaching two social psychology classes. Ironically, having a law degree qualified her to teach social psychology; that would not have been possible with just her bachelor’s degree in psychology. She learned a great deal from having to prepare her lectures, seeking references from her fellow professors for her voracious reading. She confronted her fear of public speaking again when the university, which had a shortage of psychology teachers, sponsored a teacher training program. “My hands still trembled for many years, but the fear of public speaking eventually passed. Even to this day, I say a little prayer before a speech, praying that my speech will be useful.”

The school’s director paired her with a new professor, Dr. Elena Hochman, who had recently arrived from Germany, directing them to collaborate in teaching students to write more lucidly. Although Maritza resisted the forced collaboration initially, they quickly became best friends, sharing a similar sense of humor. They created a program to teach students how to read and write critically, where students wrote a one-page summary of an article they had read and constantly refined it after analysis by Maritza, Elena and the class. This model for teaching writing was broadened to teaching students about ordering data for research and general thinking skills, resulting in significantly improved communications skills. “However, this labor intensive effort was killing us,” due to the number of papers needing to be read, re-read and corrected. Instead, they wrote a small handbook and “sold it” to the university press, originally asking for a print run of 500. “We were anxious that it would not sell and be an embarrassment. However, the first 500 were sold out within a month and, to this date, it still sells. The last I heard, in the 1990s, it had sold over 100,000 copies, not counting pirated copies.”

To be promoted to the next academic rank, she needed to pass an exam and propose a research program. To that end, she joined a research project underway in an indigenous territory of Venezuela. She became great friends with the project leader, anthropologist José (Pepe) Cruz. She studied the Wayuu language and there she broadened her conception of a scholar’s role, from theoretical inquiry to studying “what people need.”

In 1974, she entered Simon Bolivar University in Caracas, earning a Masters degree in psychology. She concentrated on social psychology courses and earned that degree in 1979.

However, 1975 was a transformative year for Maritza. In that year, a government agency requested that her department intervene in a newly built housing project that was being “trashed” by the residents. The agency observed that the buildings were deteriorating within a year of being occupied. The
entire department was deployed in their various disciplines to generate solutions. She approached the problem as a classic social psychology problem, depending on a review of documents, observations and questionnaires. Her original hypothesis placed the blame on the residents. When she visited the interior of residents’ apartments for interviews, she observed that they were immaculate. Her hypothesis then shifted to the locus of responsibility being with management, related to the fact that the residents did not have an ownership stake in the property’s common areas. This was a revelation to her. However, Venezuela, she was struck by its insights. In fact, at the time, I did not know what was missing from her research was a substantive plan for addressing the problem, an intervention which would involve working with the residents.

On a trip to Colombia, she was given a photocopy of a book by Orlando Fals Borda, the original copies having been burned during political strife in that country. Reading it on the flight back to Venezuela, she was struck by its insights. She passed it along to her students, who were considering how to approach a study of another public housing problem. “From my cubicle, I heard my students’ cries of ‘esto ES!’ ‘(this is IT’). Borda offered a better concept for approaching the problem. At the time, I did not know that the approach was community psychology. In fact, at the time, I did not know anything about community psychology.”

The year of 1975 also marked the convening of the Venezuelan Association of Social Psychology (AVEPSO), intended to foster research for action in Venezuela and Latin America. “At the time, we only had $600, a meager amount. But we were ambitious.” Four members of the group, including one with political contacts, met with the President of Venezuela who agreed, much to their surprise, to permit the use of a beautiful governmental facility in which to hold the First Latin American Conference of Social Psychology.

In 1977, Irma Serrano-García of Puerto Rico submitted an explicitly community psychology article to AVEPSO’s theory and methodology oriented bulletin, created by Carlos Muñoz and Maritza. Irma’s paper had a large impact in Latin America because it demonstrated a methodology, psicología comunitaria, for integrating action and intervention into scholarly research on social problems.

In 1979, Maritza organized a symposium at the 17th Inter-American Congress, held in Lima, Peru that focused on consumer participation in social interventions. There she met Bob Newbrough (of the U.S.), who informed those in attendance that the work they were reporting WAS community psychology. “At that time, we were just beginning to learn about the ideas of community psychology,” she said.

Even though she was academically well established, Maritza did not yet have a doctorate. Unlike the U.S., where many doctoral students come straight from college without significant prior work experience, in Venezuela, persons enter a doctoral program as “full adults,” with considerable work experience. Maritza was expected to have identified, from the beginning, the subject on which she would write her dissertation. The first 6 months to a year is spent thinking about the problem until the approach is accepted by the faculty. Maritza earned three-fourths of her Ph.D. credits in Caracas.

In 1980, Maritza was offered a one-year fellowship to do research and to lecture in Oxford, England. She took both her daughters with her, and her husband visited them periodically. During that year, she worked on her Ph.D. thesis in sociology. Through an inter-university accord and having been granted a sabbatical from her Venezuelan university, she transferred from Oxford to the University of Paris from which she earned her doctorate. “I knew French from school with the nuns in Venezuela but also had studied French, in my youth, when I was sent to a convent school in the U.S. to learn English. However, the rapid switch from Oxford, speaking English, to French, was difficult for me,” she said. Nevertheless, she completed her thesis in one year – a psychohistorical thesis about how Venezuela’s national identity has been presented in the political discourse of both scholars and politicians. She defended her thesis in October 1982. It was subsequently published in Spanish, received a prestigious award in 1984 and has been re-published with 8 revisions. She proudly notes that in 2000 a Venezuelan newspaper selected this book as among those having had a substantial impact in the 20th century in Venezuela.

Her receipt of a prestigious national social science award has an interesting back story. Usually presented by the head of the Ministry of Science and Technology, the president of Venezuela – Hugo Chavez – personally presented the award to her, proclaiming his admiration of her work and accompanied by what she considered an embarrassing kiss on the cheek. The event was covered on national television.

Although she occasionally has taught short courses at other universities, she calls the Central University “my intellectual home.” She is grateful to the University for having trusted her “to an incredible extent.” In addition to teaching and supervising dissertations, Maritza is widely published and lectures, being much in demand. Maritza is even listed in Wikipedia!

Our interview for this column was held in a secluded room, and yet someone – realizing she was inside – interrupted the interview, seeking Maritza’s autograph. Having also noticed that she was besieged at the Puebla conference for photos and counsel, I asked Maritza about academic fame. “It’s a little odd,” she
said, “but I never say no, feeling it’s my job to share.” On the other hand, Maritza expressed a strong distaste for academic celebrity worship. For example, she cautions people not to make a saint of the legendary Ignacio Martín Baró (with whom she had a solid friendship and academic collaboration) whose concept of power she finds useful but lacking, not extending much beyond Max Weber. Martín Baró himself would have rejected such “worship.” Nor does she want herself canonized. “Some people want a recipe, easy answers, but I challenge my students and audiences to have their own opinions and to question my theories.”

Starting her academic career as a classical social psychologist, she had never considered intervening in social phenomena. When she moved to a community psychology based in interventionism, she began with a narrow, territorial conception of community. But experience in the field, including failures, forced her to broaden her perspective to a relational conception of community. “Even Wittgenstein eventually changed his theory,” she said. So she vigorously encourages new ideas, likening the field of community psychology to the living heart: “allowing new blood in and expelling exhausted blood.”

Now retired, Maritza still is on the academic council of the university’s Ph.D. program; tutors a few students; writes books (her most recent being a co-edited book with Christopher Sonn, Psychology of Liberation: Theory and Application), and contributes book chapters and articles. She serves on several editorial boards, including being senior associate editor of the American Journal of Community Psychology, and is active in various professional societies. Her writings and speeches are highly influential, especially in Latin America where she is regularly cited. Otherwise, her life consists of a “hectic travel schedule,” invited to lecture around the world. Included are visits to her two daughters who live in Europe – one an architect; the other a freelance documentary film producer and a published poet.

When asked to identify her major contribution to community psychology, Maritza named two: First, the production of knowledge “by entwining the fields of politics and community psychology, like a double helix.” Second, she values creating relationships of shared ideas, following the model of connections that had been facilitated by several key mentors on her behalf over the years.

Regional Update

Edited by Susan Dvorak McMahon, smcmahon@depaul.edu

I’m very pleased to be serving in my new role as SCRA Regional Network Coordinator! I would like to sincerely thank Bernadette Sánchez for doing a great job in this role over the past three years, and for helping to make the transition a smooth one. I am honored to have recently had the opportunity to travel to Egypt for a guest lecture at the American University of Cairo (AUC). I was able to speak with faculty and undergraduate and graduate students about my research, applications of community psychology across different contexts, and about SCRA. AUC has a new masters program in community psychology, and the students were especially interested in becoming more connected with community psychologists in other parts of the world, and in building bridges with American universities to develop exchange programs. My hope is that our discussions will lead to the addition of International Regional Liaisons from this region, a current gap for SCRA, as well as increased communication and collaboration regarding the work we are all doing. A special thanks to Joseph Simons Rudolph for coordinating and hosting my visit of Maryland.
In the face of the recent threat to Australian Community Psychology's (CP) status as a legitimate psychological discipline, local members recently held an open night for students and community members to publicize SCRA. The evening was intended to promote and operate under the values of mutual respect and to be feminist, social change and social justice friendly; hence it was promoted as an “Empowerment dialogue.” It was decided that a public lecture or forum on a topic of interest would be an appropriate vehicle for disseminating information about SCRA and fostering the recruitment of new members. Tentative ideas for the theme of the evening included: Global indigenous oppression; the gendered nature of HIV as a vehicle for the oppression of women and so forth. In recognition of the United Nations summit on the Millennium Development Goals we were fortunate enough to attract an international speaker: Mr. Pramote Eua-amnuay who founded the Borderless Friendship Foundation (BFF see: www.borderlessfriendshipfoundation.org) to promote the mental, social, educational and whole wellbeing of indigenous children who have no citizenship, education or health service access in Thailand. This presentation, co-facilitated by Ms. Lorel Mayberry, a prominent Australian sexologist, described how the foundation assures the wellbeing of the children and their community based approach to promoting the mental and educational health of children who otherwise are at risk of being trafficked into the international sex trade.
was a broad social justice topic which attracted medical professionals, social workers, writers and government officials as well as psychologists and students.

As part of the forum a montage was made describing the function, perspectives and ethics of SCRA and its value to those interested in social justice and dealing with oppression. The latest community psychology flyer and the new postcards and description brochures were made available to attendees. The combined SCRA, UCPSARnet, mental health focus on the eradication of poverty and injustice was very successful. Attendees stayed for more than an hour after the presentation and local members were able to welcome new visitors and answer any questions and queries they had. As this was Mr. Eua-amnuay’s first visit to Australia it was an excellent opportunity to capture students with a passion for social justice. As a result of the evening the local networking list more than doubled.

A few weeks after this event the National Ministerial Council responsible for determining the Endorsed Areas of practice for the Psychology Profession gave approval for the inclusion of community psychology as a specialist area of practice. This move accords community psychology recognition as a legitimate specialist sub-discipline within the field of psychology. It is a necessary acknowledgment for the funding of University courses, the attraction of new students and for employment opportunities for graduates in the field.

Having community psychology continue to be excluded from recognition under the National Registration process, which took effect July 1 2010, would have meant the loss of Australia’s training programs in CP. Ultimately this would have resulted in the demise of the Australian Psychological Society branch of College of Community Psychologists and the loss of the academic discipline in Australia.

The Council’s decision to approve community psychology was the direct result of tireless work from many within the Australian Psychological Society, the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA), other key stakeholders and the combined lobbying of SCRA colleagues in the U.S. and around the globe. Associate Professor Lynne Cohen, Chair of the APS College of Community Psychologists, extended heartfelt thanks to all who signed petitions, wrote letters to the Federal member or to the National Council and to those who lobbied tirelessly, including Ms. Heather Gridley. She observed that there was much work to be done to increase membership of the College and participation in community psychology postgraduate programmes in Australia. She expressed the hope that recognition under the National scheme could be the beginning of a new era for community psychology. SCRA Australia expresses thanks and appreciation for all of your support thus far and for your continued support as international colleagues as we continue to expand community psychology in the Australian context.

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News from Canada
Written by Liesette Brunson

We are pleased to announce that Robb Travers is the incoming International Liaison for Canada! Dr. Travers is an assistant professor in community psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University and holds additional appointments at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, and the Centre for Research in Inner City Health, St. Michael’s Hospital. Dr. Travers is a leader in the community-based research movement in Canada, and his community and academic partnerships focus on social exclusion and the health and well-being of trans communities and LGBT youth. He serves as Co-Principal Investigator on the Ontario-wide Trans PULSE project, the largest health-related research initiative focused on trans people in Canada to date. Dr. Travers is also the Director of the Equity, Sexual Health and HIV Research Group at the Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action at Wilfrid Laurier University. In this role, Dr. Travers is dedicated to mentoring students in action research, building community capacity for change, and improving quality of life for marginalized communities.

In other news, Tim Aubry, professor of psychology at the University of Ottawa, recently delivered the keynote address...
at the 3rd International Conference on Community Psychology in Puebla, Mexico. An established researcher in the fields of community mental health and homelessness, Dr. Aubry co-founded the Centre for Research on Community and Educational Services (CRECS) at University of Ottawa in 2000. CRECS is a multidisciplinary research unit intended to conduct applied community-based research that contributes to effective health and social programs and policies for marginalized populations. The title of his talk was “Conducting Research on Homelessness in Canada from a Community Psychology Perspective: Reflections on Lessons Learned.”

Sylvie Jutras, professor of psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal, was recently recognized with a prize for the best scientific communication at the recent 7th European Community Psychology held in Paris, France. Her communication presented the results of the study “The neighbourhood as an ecosystem favourable to well-being: The perspectives of paraplegic residents and their families.” Delphine Labbé, Vallèrie Lafrence, Caroline Lanoue, Dominique Jutras and Odile Sévigny were coauthors on the paper.

A special section of the journal Canadian Psychology recently focused on “Community Psychology in Canada” (2010, Volume 51, Number 2). This section included articles and commentary on training, theory, research and practice, as well as a vision for the future of community psychology in Canada.

Results from the Better Beginnings Better Futures (BBBF) project were published in the Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development outlining the grade 3, 6 and 9 impacts of the BBBF project on children, families and communities (Ray Peters, Colleen Loomis, Mark Pancer and Geoff Nelson). In addition, in a book distributed to 33 countries, UNESCO featured Better Beginnings as an exemplary model of a community-based prevention and promotion intervention for pre-school and early childhood care and development.

In upcoming news, be sure to watch out for the CU Expo 2011 to be held on May 10-14, 2011 in Waterloo, Ontario! The expo, whose theme is “Community-University Partnerships: Bringing Global Perspectives to Local Action,” will showcase the exemplars in community-university partnerships worldwide, and explore and introduce creative ways of strengthening local communities. Participants from diverse horizons will have the opportunity to enjoy conversation and together explore the importance of community-university partnerships.

West Region, U.S.

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News from the Hawai’i Region

Written by Maria Chun

Our Program Director and founder of our APA-award winning graduate program, Clifford O’Donnell, will be retiring on December 31, 2010. We will be featuring a special article on him in the Spring 2011 issue of TCP.

We have kicked off early bird registration for our 2nd Cross-Cultural Health Care Conference: Collaborative and Multidisciplinary Interventions, which will take place at the Hyatt Regency Waikiki Resort and Spa on October 7-8, 2011 on Oahu, Hawaii. The University of Hawaii at Manoa’s (UHM) Department of Surgery is the lead organizer of the event and is collaborating with 13 other organizations, including the UHM Department of Psychology’s and SCRA -- Western Region. More details, including a registration form, can be found at www.cchc-conference.com.
News from the Midwest Region

Written by Ray Legler

Preparations have begun for the upcoming SCRA session at the Midwest Psychological Association conference in Chicago May 5-7, 2011. We look forward to another set of presentations and posters that reflect the rich body of research being conducted by community psychology students and practitioners here in the Midwest. We are also preparing with great anticipation to host the next SCRA Biennial conference in Chicago. The field’s premier conference will be held June 16-19, 2011, with the theme: New Pathways Toward Community Change and Transformation. We are excited to host those in the field of community psychology from all over the world who are working toward community and social change. Plan to attend – between the stimulating conference presentations and the wealth of cultural and recreational activities Chicago has to offer, you’ll have a fantastic time.
Greetings from the School Intervention Interest Group!

In this issue, we present a brief article from Nadia Ward, Lakeesha Woods, Cindy Crusto, Michael Strambler, and Lance Linke from The Consultation Center at Yale University. The authors describe the Maximizing Adolescent Academic eXcellence (MAAX) program, a social development program designed to foster academic aspirations in urban youth. The authors highlight the value to the program both to the urban youth participants and benefits to doctoral and masters level trainees who participate in program delivery.

Creating a safe space to learn: The significant role of graduate students in fostering educational engagement and aspirations among urban youth

Written by Nadia L. Ward, Lakeesha N. Woods, Cindy A. Crusto, Michael J. Strambler, and Lance H. Linke

Studies show that when students have the opportunity to develop important social skills such as self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, educational engagement and academic performance is increased (Zins, Payton, Weissberg, & O’Brien, 2007). Research in social-emotional learning further suggests that creating more caring and safe classroom environments enhances student development of social and emotional skills. In these supportive environments, students feel more comfortable approaching and interacting with teachers, participating in classroom activities and discussions, and making meaningful connections to their peers where these skills are reinforced continuously (Payton et al. 2008; Ward, 2006). In addition, Murdock, Hale, and Weber (2001) found that students who characterize their classroom environment as caring and report that teachers and students are respectful of one another, demonstrate increased class participation and are more likely to complete homework.

With ongoing support and supervision, graduate students can be an effective means of creating meaningful relationships with youth and establishing safe and responsive classroom environments that facilitate learning.

Despite the aforementioned value of social development programs in improving educational outcomes for youth, quality implementation of social development programs in schools is often hampered by pressure placed on teachers to improve student performance on standardized assessments (Ravitch, 2000). Graduate students, however, present an underutilized yet valuable resource in the implementation of school-based preventive interventions. With ongoing support and supervision, graduate students can be an effective means of creating meaningful relationships with youth and establishing safe and responsive classroom environments that facilitate learning.

In this paper, we present a program description and initial evaluation findings of a school-based intervention delivered by graduate students within a supportive classroom environment that is designed to enhance social competencies, increase educational engagement and heighten the educational aspirations of urban middle school youth.

Program Description

The MAAX (Maximizing Adolescent Academic eXcellence) program is a culturally relevant, classroom-tested social development program designed to promote competence in academic, social, and emotional domains for urban youth while fostering educational aspirations. The curriculum consists of eight core modules that highlight college awareness and preparation within the context of a developmental assets model: 1) Managing the Middle School Transition; 2) Keys to Academic Success; 3) Exploring College; 4) Who am I; 5) How Values Shape My Life; 6) Getting Along with Others; 7) Strengthening Community Connections; and 8) Managing the High School Transition. The MAAX program is delivered as an in-school and after school program for 7th and 8th grade students. Students participating in the program receive 45-50 minutes of workshop sessions weekly for 24 weeks.

One distinguishing feature of the MAAX program is its emphasis on building important skill sets in cognitive, social and emotional domains within the context of developing students’ orientation toward postsecondary options and the future. The underlying theme of the program is the exploration of various college options. Students learn to develop, apply, and practice important social skills to novel situations in a way that anchors them toward the goal of successful high school completion and matriculation into the postsecondary option of their choice. Another unique characteristic of MAAX is its cultural relevance as the program curriculum explicitly addresses socio-cultural factors found to positively impact academic achievement especially among African-American and Latino students.
One distinguishing feature of the MAAX program is its emphasis on building important skill sets in cognitive, social and emotional domains within the context of developing students' orientation toward postsecondary options and the future.

An innovation of this program is the use of masters and doctoral level graduate students to serve as facilitators to deliver the curriculum to urban middle school students. An underlying assumption of our approach is that graduate students serve as important role models to students as they convey key curriculum content on the development of social skills. Graduate students hired reflect the racial and ethnic composition of students served by the district. In our experience, graduate students serve as role models who, by virtue of their own educational pursuits, demonstrate by example that not only is college a viable option, but earning a graduate level degree also lies within the realm of possibility for urban students. Facilitators also inspire and motivate middle school students by sharing their decision-making process in determining college and career choices, obstacles they overcame, and future career aspirations. Graduate students also discuss the myths and realities of college life—both academic and social—and the significance of their high school experience in preparing for their transition into college.

Initial Findings

To evaluate MAAX, we used a pre-post design to examine program effectiveness with respect to academic engagement and aspirations among a 7th and 8th grade sample of urban ethnic minority students. Two preliminary studies examined the impact of the MAAX on student outcomes. The first study assessed student retention of curriculum content knowledge. Curriculum modules were divided into two domains: school modules and social skills modules. Students were pretested on curriculum assessment items prior to the start of the program and completed a posttest at the end of the program. Pre-post analyses revealed significant mean differences on both school ($t_{91} = 6.18, p < .001$) and social skills modules ($t_{76} = 3.42, p = .001$) at posttest. The second study utilized a pretest-post test comparison group design. We hypothesized that greater exposure to MAAX will be associated with greater academic engagement and aspirations to attend college. Preliminary results indicated significant pre-post differences for students who had nine or more hours of the intervention. These students demonstrated increased reading for pleasure ($t_{202} = 2.90, p = .01$) and homework completion ($t_{202} = 2.41, p = .02$) at posttest. Findings also revealed a trend toward increased educational aspirations ($t_{202} = 1.94, p = .06$). In summary, results indicated that the amount of participation in the MAAX program was significantly associated with increases in: a) number of hours students spent doing homework; b) students' aspirations to graduate from a two-year college; and c) the number of hours students spent reading for pleasure.

Qualitative Findings. Focus groups data provide additional indication that the program had a positive impact on middle school students. Twelve focus groups were conducted with 220 students representing 6 middle schools. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to obtain information about student perceptions of the MAAX program. Randomly selected MAAX classrooms participated in focus group interviews. Classes consisted of approximately 18 to 24 students. The research team worked in pairs to conduct the focus groups; one team member was the primary interviewer while a second team member assisted in the interview process by audio taping, taking notes, and asking follow-up questions. The focus group protocol queried students as to their experience in the program. A constant comparative method was used to analyze the qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once the data were collected and transcribed,
For example, a female student stated, “This program has helped me do better in my classes…I raise my hand more to answer questions…I am not afraid to read out loud in class.”

The program has also served to develop students’ future orientation, to envision their lives beyond high school. In exploring college and careers, students reported they now understand the benefit of a college education and the direct relationship between years of education and annual income. A female student reported, “[The MAAX] helped me think about what I want to do in the future. It put my focus on the future.”

Students further indicated that they realized the connection between their school performance in middle- and high school and the impact their academic performance has on their educational trajectory and career choices. A student expressed the following sentiment, “[The MAAX] made me realize how important my grades are for my future, what kind of college I apply to, and my job.”

Students were most favorable in their evaluation of facilitators who led MAAX sessions. Students related to the facilitators with ease; they often referred to their facilitators as “cool,” “easy to talk to,” “kind” and “helpful.” Student comments further indicated that the program created a safe space where students felt supported. “They made me feel like I could talk to them about anything.” As a male student noted, “[Our facilitators] made sure that others didn’t make fun of us.” Program facilitators also provided a consistent message of support and encouragement to students in the realization of their academic, personal, and college/career goals. One student shared, “They wanted us to achieve our goals.” Other students commented on how the program helped them feel more engaged in school. As one female student reported, “This program kept me from dropping out of school.” Another female student shared, “Our facilitators are always here for us…they come before our session to help us with our work and stay after if we need them.”

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of the MAAX program, a school-based social development program designed to increase students’ educational engagement and aspirations for low-income and urban ethnic minority students. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the MAAX program has shown early evidence of promoting social competencies and increasing educational engagement and aspirations among urban youth. Initial evaluative findings suggest that the MAAX program appears to have a positive impact on developing students’ social competencies, educational engagement, and educational aspirations. Graduate students serve a critical function in their ability to establish rapport and create a safe space within the classroom. Middle school students can fully engage in interactive sessions with facilitators as they learn about college and important skills that teach them how to engage in creative problem solving, exercising responsible decision-making, establishing personal and academic goals and learning to communicate effectively with peers and adults. In their authentic sharing about their own educational trajectories, graduate students bring a lively and youthful perspective that captures the attention of middle school students. Graduate student facilitators debunk misconceptions adolescents have about college and orient them toward envisioning a future that includes college as a viable option.

Study limitations. It is important that future assessments of MAAX rely on other academic outcome measures such as student performance on state standardized assessments. Despite the limitations, these results are a positive indicator that MAAX indeed has the desired impact of expanding the knowledge of post-secondary educational options available to youth in urban schools. Further, most of these analyses are based on data gathered when The MAAX was in its infancy. Future studies will address the impact of the MAAX in increasing academic achievement outcomes for urban middle school students.

Initial evaluative findings suggest that the MAAX program appears to have a positive impact on developing students’ social competencies, educational engagement, and educational aspirations.
Student Issues

Edited by Todd Bottom and Lindsey Zimmerman

The Oxford House model: A pathway to empowerment for women

Written by Bronwyn Hunter, DePaul University

The construct of empowerment has been utilized in many different contexts with various populations. Given the large conceptual and theoretical basis for empowerment, we were interested in identifying factors that contributed to empowerment for women who were in recovery from substance use. Women who abuse drugs and/or alcohol often have unique barriers to maintaining their recovery, such as the need for gender responsive services, a lack of childcare and housing, and limited educational and employment histories and opportunities. A subset of women who have engaged in substance use have also had involvement in the criminal justice system. These women often have similar needs to those of women who engage in substance abuse; however, they may face additional challenges due to the stigmatization and discrimination they experience for being ex-offenders in society.

Although various models of aftercare have been proposed to address the needs of women in recovery and women ex-offenders, we believed the Oxford House model, a self-run, democratic, sober living environment, provided a unique set of factors that empowered women through their recovery and reentry into the community. For example, the Oxford House model promotes the principles of personal responsibility and autonomy, as each house is independently supported by house members. Previous research demonstrated that variables such as abstinence, length of stay, social support, and increased self-efficacy

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References


The present study explored factors of women’s empowerment by modifying and testing a measure of empowerment among a cross-sectional sample of 296 women who lived in Oxford Houses located throughout the United States. A team of undergraduate research volunteers assisted with calling each women’s Oxford House (N=312) to ask women to participate in the study. Participants completed the survey by mail or online, and were entered into a raffle for their participation in the study. Grant funds from the SCRA Graduate Student Research Grant were utilized for the cost of phone calls, postage and supplies. To assess empowerment, participants completed the Personal Progress Scale-Revised (PPS-R; Johnson, Worrell & Chandler, 2005), a 28-item scale originally designed to measure empowerment for women in feminist therapy. In order to evaluate variables specific to women in recovery who lived in Oxford House, 20 questions were added to this scale based on factors identified in previous research as important to women’s recovery from substance use and integral to the Oxford House model.

In addition, participants completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), a global measure of self-esteem. Results from exploratory factor analysis identified a 21-item scale comprised of three factors. The Self-Perception factor contained items assessing women’s leadership qualities, personal strength, competence, and autonomy. The Resource Knowledge factor contained items measuring knowledge of resources in the community, and the Participation factor was comprised of items that evaluated participation in community activities. Additional analyses provided support for the construct validity of empowerment and for the importance of length of stay in Oxford House. A detailed manuscript of our findings and the implications for empowerment theory is currently being prepared for publication.

References

The Importance Between
Written by Seb Prohn, M.S.,
North Carolina State University

We always returned to it no matter who we were or how it was changed or with what difficulties, or ease, it could be reached.
–Ernest Hemmingway, from A Moveable Feast

The Southeastern Eco has become tradition—it’s sacred. Each conference reifies our community values and capacities to promote positive change. This year, Eco coordinator Melissa Strompolis and UNC-Charlotte bridged Eco’s traditional comforting climate with a scrupulous professionalism, successfully proving the two are not mutually exclusive.

For a year we wait for a Saturday of reconnection and rediscovery. However, over the years, I come to understand the expedition to Eco as part of the conference’s allure. In past years, shared vans have permitted within-school bonding as we traversed to Atlanta, Asheville and Columbia seeking between-school cohesion. None of these rides has been precisely similar, but this year’s trip to the Southeast Eco Conference was dramatically different. Dr. Craig Brookins, Dr. Roger Mitchell and I decided going to Eco could also mean going green. As the two professors caught a train early Friday morning to the conference, I set out 24 hours in advance in order to bike from Raleigh to Charlotte. What I learned during roughly 180 miles in the saddle prepared me not only for our region’s “moveable feast” but also for a personal reconceptualization of the graduate school process.

Two of my heroes, Jim Kelly (2006) and Julian Rappaport (in Kelly & Song, 2004), detailed retrospective accounts of how chance events dramatically altered their lives’ trajectories. Bandura (2001) suggests the probability for such fortuitous chance events, to a certain degree, can be increased by living inquisitively and venturesomely - the bike ride through...
North Carolina’s Piedmont offered me both. Likewise, the pursuit of our degrees has also offered opportunities to manage fortuity through our community emersions and partnerships, networking across academic institutions and persistently questioning the status quo.

During my ride, drivers passing me on state highways and country roads chose to preserve my safety. I felt like a member of the road and support from strangers in the form of kind, motivational conversation kept my legs churning towards each next stop. I perceived a mobile sense of community, similar to what I felt during those Eco bus rides of previous years, but this time with strangers. Graduate school, too, requires community and social support. This is why each year I leave Eco reinvigorated—ready to push towards my next academic milestone.

In my first day, a 92 mile ride transformed into over 110 miles. Unmarked roads and mental fatigue led to wrong turns, unexpected climbs, sprints from pursuing dogs and the premature depletion of water bottles. However, wrong turns also allowed for reorientation, mistake acceptance and patience. Graduate school has similarly offered twists and obstacles. In these instances, the journey to Eco has informed my journey to a Ph.D.—stay adventurous, seek support and arrive at your destination via small, achievable goals.

It has been argued that by being in places our identities are elaborated (Kelly 2004). But graduate school and my journey to Eco have helped me appreciate the emergent identity discovered between places.

References


Updates from the 2010 Midwest Eco Conference
Written by Urmitapa Dutta, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The clinical-community graduate students of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosted this year’s Midwest Ecological-Community Psychology Conference (Midwest ECO) on October 9th and 10th. The conference theme this year was, Showcasing Methods: The Tools for Research and Practice. The conference was a great success with over 110 attendees across 14 universities and several community organizations. Participants spanned multiple disciplinary and practice contexts, thus realizing the objective of this year’s conference - to encourage dialogue among students and faculty from community psychology and other allied disciplines, practitioners and community organizations. A highlight of the conference was the incisive, thought-provoking keynote address on “Critical Issues in Social Justice and Participatory Action Research” by Dr. Norman K. Denzin (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). In his address, Dr. Denzin discussed some of the issues involved in pursuing research/action with an ethically responsible social justice agenda. He demonstrated his arguments through a performative piece in which he had volunteers read from the play, Justice Now. Dr. Julian Rappaport introduced the speaker and while doing so illuminated some of the interesting ways in which community psychology, qualitative inquiry, and the social justice agenda have converged over the years, especially on the University of Illinois campus.

Midwest ECO has traditionally been a student-led conference and we furthered this commitment to include a significant number of motivated undergraduate students in planning and organizing the conference, thus scaffolding their socialization into community research and action. The conference offered hands-on workshops on multilevel modeling, geographic information systems and mixed-methods, to advance the conference theme. A grant writing 101 workshop was also offered to familiarize students with NSF and other grant application processes. In line with the conference theme, the different sessions ran the entire gamut of methods including mixed methods, participatory action research, geographic information systems, multilevel modeling as well as a range of content areas like race, ethnicity, culture, schools, space, voice, community engagement, public schools, gendered violence, etc. We also had a number of awards for outstanding presentations and posters. Participants were required to apply separately for these awards and submit extended abstracts. An awards committee composed of representatives from previous Midwest ECO hosts rated all the abstracts and the final decision was based on mean ratings. We congratulate this year’s award winners: Jodi Peterson (Michigan State University), Emily Dworkin (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Keith Zander (University of Illinois, Chicago), and Shabnam Javdani (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign).

Community psychology as a field recognizes the critical significance of social climate. It is thus imperative that we are cognizant of the social climate of spaces we create and inhabit. In this regard, the 2010 Midwest ECO has been a great success. A rich array of ideas, research and practice were shared and presented in a very collaborative and supportive atmosphere, making it as meaningful as it was intellectually stimulating for participants. Creating such an environment requires active effort on everyone’s part and we would like to thank all those who attended.
Competing Five Years of ECO in the Northwest

Written by Colleen Kidney and Mazna Patka,
Portland State Universität

On October 15th, 2010, we celebrated the 5th Annual Northwest Ecological-Community Psychology Conference (“ECO”) at Portland State University. Every year, the traditionally student-led conference is guided by psychology faculty Eric Mankowski and Elizabeth Thomas at Portland State University and University of Washington-Bothell respectively. ECO has quickly matured since 2005, with this year being the largest and most successful conference yet! A regional record number of 70 attendees enjoyed a diverse day of 25 workshops, roundtables, symposia, and poster presentations from students, faculty, and community partners. Our theme, “Community Based Research: Collaboration, Methods, and Advances” was reflected throughout the day by presenters from a diverse array of perspectives and fields. We were fortunate to have engaging and inspiring keynote speakers to set the tone for the conference. Dr. Mike Hendricks, one of our keynote speakers, engaged young professionals interested in the field of program evaluation through his experiences and career guidance. Later in the day, keynote Dr. Hank Bersani educated attendees about the evolution of the disability social rights movement in the United States and internationally.

The attendees and presenters at the ECO conference truly made this year a unique experience to connect with and learn from others outside our own psychology department. Our program boasted presenters from not only Oregon and Washington, but also from Wichita State University, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Pacifica Graduate Institute, and University of Valencia, Spain. Additionally, our presenters represented a variety of fields utilizing community psychology approaches, such as organizational psychology and environmental psychology. This year we collaborated with Portland State University’s Psi Chi chapter, which not only gave us support the day of the conference, but also drew a large undergraduate presence to the conference.

As with any large event, we overcame many obstacles in the planning and execution of ECO. Luckily, the biggest tragedy of the day was a shortage of cheese on the sandwich platter! We have an amazing committee of organizers to thank for all the hard work that contributed to our success, including Erin Stack, Aubrey Perry, Michael Higginbotham, and Corina Daugherty, as well as support from faculty members Eric Mankowski and Katie McDonald.

As we reflect on five years of Northwest ECO, we are excited and hopeful for the future of our regional conference. Our modest regional conference can only grow with the continued support of the faculty, professionals, and students in the Northwest. We are thankful and proud to be included in the history of the ECO conference in the Northwest. We hope others involved were equally as inspired and invigorated by the relationships and ideas formed this year, and we can’t wait to see you next year! ☺
Community Psychology Students Host a Successful Social Networking Event

Written by Todd Bottom, DePaul University, Debra Trude-Suter, National-Lewis University, and Monika Black, DePaul University

Networking is an important and critical function of community psychologists, and a great way for students to ease into the world of networking is to begin building both professional and personal relationships with one another. As community psychologists, our knowledge about a sense of community for the populations that we serve is far too great to not model a similar behavior within our profession. While there are currently several professional outlets for emerging community psychologists, including professional organizations and research conferences, many opportunities for students and emerging professionals to personally connect across academic institutions are at the regional or national level. More space is needed for the next generation of community psychology students to dialogue and to become motivated and inspired by colleagues and peers.

In Chicago alone, there are now three universities (DePaul, National-Louis, and The University of Illinois at Chicago) offering doctoral degrees in community psychology, and current enrollment of those three programs is near 60 students. As a way to create a pool of contacts from which each of us can draw upon for leads, referrals, ideas, and information gathering, a social networking event was organized by four students from the three universities. On September 15th, 2010, nearly 30 community psychology doctoral students, along with a few undergraduate students, met at Chicago’s downtown Millennium Park between Michigan Avenue and Lake Shore Drive. Located on the “Magnificent Mile,” the venue contained an outdoor seating area that bustled with energy and was complemented by beautiful weather.

In planning for the event, the four student organizers communicated via email for two months in order to select an event date and location, to secure promotional items, and to create and send the invitation list. Online invitations were sent to nearly 70 graduate and undergraduate community psychology students at the three schools, and autographed books were donated by Joseph Ferrari, Judah Viola, Leonard Jason, and Tom Wolff to help promote attendance. In addition, the publisher Taylor and Francis donated two annual subscriptions of the Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community, free online access and individual issues of JPIC for each attendee, and funding for appetizers.

The event was a perfect opportunity to combine business networking and social fun, and was designed to help students make new contacts and to begin to build new friendships. Leetosha Walker, a second year student at NLU, commented, “This event was truly a success. I am grateful with so many passionate people.” Several students also expressed interest in meeting again to continue fostering friendships and to offer and receive professional development from one another. In response to the event’s success, networking groups on LinkedIn and Facebook have been created to support the ongoing engagement of the students, and many students that attended have subscribed to one or both online groups. As we continue to realize the need for students to socialize and to build upon each other’s strengths, plans are already underway to offer more similar events throughout the year. The authors encourage students at other schools to proactively engage students across institutions and programs as a means of increasing personal and professional development. We would be excited to read reports of similar successful experiences in future issues of The Community Psychologist.
To help students offset the costs of traveling to the annual Eco conferences, the SCRA National Student Representatives, with support from the Executive Committee, make available a number of travel awards each Fall. To apply for consideration, students are required to submit an application which includes information such as reason for the funding request, description of their Eco presentation, and a copy of their curriculum vitae. While applicants are not required to present research at the Eco conferences and may attend an Eco conference outside of their regional geographic area, students must be members of SCRA to receive travel funding awards.

This year six students received $300 each for travel to Eco. We congratulate the following students on receiving this year’s Eco Travel Fund Award: Jameta Barlow (North Carolina State University), Kati Corlew (University of Hawaii at Manoa), Ciuinal Lewis (National-Louis University, Chicago), Darnell Motley (DePaul University), Gina Vetis (Bowling Green State University), and Adam Voight (Vanderbilt University).

Children’s perceptions of their environment, specifically when they feel safe, have positive effects on their social-emotional functioning and academic attainment. Compelling evidence suggests that the environmental contexts in which children live influence their development over extended periods of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, less research has examined how children perceive and understand these environmental conditions. Although individual and family characteristics have a significant impact on children’s developmental outcomes, other contexts such as neighborhood conditions, also influence child development and well-being (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Lack of perceived safety in neighborhoods affects family practices and family psychological well-being and, consequently, limits children’s opportunities for independent mobility, physical activity, and social interaction (e.g., Hume, Salmon, & Ball, 2005). Among the few studies that investigate children’s perspectives of their neighborhood, safety is a persistent theme that emerges during data collection (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2007). None of these studies, however, explored the meanings that children themselves attributed to safety and how safety influenced their perspectives.

The current study aimed to address the lack of research on children’s perspectives of safety in their neighborhood, particularly regarding safety. The purpose of the present study was to explore, understand, and describe neighborhood safety from the perspective of children. The aim was to investigate the meanings attributed to, and children’s experiences of safety in their neighborhood, and to answer the research question: What are children’s perspectives of safety in their neighborhood?

Participants included 15 children aged 7 to 9 years, who lived in one of the largest cities in Canada located in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC). The targeted neighborhood was ranked as having the highest crime rate among all the neighborhoods comprised in the city as well as neighborhood characteristics associated with high vulnerability for children’s development (BC Statistics, 2008; Hertzman, McLean, Kohen, Dunn, & Evans, 2002). Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis through poster advertisements placed in after-school programs, followed by letters sent home inviting parents to consent to their child’s participation in the study.

The methodology used was qualitative based on symbolic interactionism, which stresses the association between shared meanings (symbols) and social interactions (Blumer, 1977). Data collection included individual and collective drawing activities and semi-structured group interviews conducted across
In order to understand children’s co-construction of the meanings of safety in their neighborhood, it is essential to consider how the context where they lived influenced their perspectives. The main findings of this study suggest that most of the children revealed a “negative” perspective of safety in their neighborhood possibly due to the challenging characteristics of this context, supplemented by the influences of the social environment where they lived. Overall findings suggest that the dynamic relationship between the semantic opposite meanings of safety - safe and unsafe - partially contributed to children’s understanding of this concept. Attached to these meanings are the positive influences of supportive relationships as well as children’s association with safety rules taught by adults to reduce harm or avoid injury.

The “negative” emphasis of safety was mainly related to children’s knowledge about crime and, especially, about “stranger danger.” Children’s concerns with threats presented by unfamiliar adults echoed the influence that their social environment has (family and school teaching). A few children, however, reported a “positive” perspective of safety associated with supportive parent-child and friend/neighbor-child relationships.

Implications of the findings for parents, psychologists, and other professionals working with children suggest the following. First, teaching children how to be safe has its advantages (e.g., widen their repertoire on how to respond to danger) and disadvantages (e.g., may create unnecessary fear and anxiety that children will become victims of violence). It is important for parents and educators to acknowledge the benefits and risks of teaching children to protect themselves, keeping in mind that such protective strategies should be age-appropriate and should not overwhelm them with fear and anxiety. Second, increase the sense of coherence among neighbors in combination with shared expectations for informal social control (e.g., residents who are able to monitor and control behavior in their own neighborhood) may reduce children’s responsibility for safety and enhance the formal support (e.g., community policing) provided to residents who initiate strategies to prevent violence. Third, efforts to clarify children’s understanding about the message “stranger danger” should be reinforced. It is important to help children identify the appropriate responses to risky events. A suggestion is to practice the “what if” scenarios in which children would learn how to identify safe people to approach as well as role play the proper reactions to certain occasions. As a result, these practices may give children more confidence when reacting to real-life situations.

Furthermore, ongoing initiatives to lower the levels of neighborhood disorder (e.g., homeless people and garbage) are strongly recommended, as most children reported to fear crime, “hobos,” and to have had direct contact with neighborhood disorder. In addition, teaching children mechanisms to make good choices about media (e.g., video games and television) and restricting access to violent media are recommended. Finally, efforts to promote not only secure and stable relationships between the child and his or her family, but also connections between the child and other individuals outside of the family are suggested. For example, for parents who work long hours, nurturing after-school programs can promote children’s socialization. In the neighborhood, common child-friendly places free of physical and social disorder can also serve as environments for children and parents to socialize and strengthen their social networks.

To sum up, the present study brings to the forefront research regarding neighborhood influences.
in child development with respect to the experiences and understandings of children about safety in their neighborhood. This study provided children the opportunity to construct the meanings of safety through social interaction; a topic that has not been previously addressed in the existing literature. Increasing children’s feelings of safety may positively impact their perspectives about their environment and, consequently promote positive life experiences. It is our duty to support children’s feelings of safety throughout their development.

References

Intergenerational Leadership and Urban Community Gardens: Promoting Social Capital and Respect for Diversity

Written by Judith A. Kent and Karen M. Lynch, National-Louis University

The shared space of a community garden can promote citizen participation, empower community members, enhance mental and physical individual wellness, and ultimately, create positive social change. Community gardens are “organized initiatives whereby sections of land are used to produce food or flowers in an urban environment for the personal use or collective benefit of their members who, by virtue of their participation, share certain resources, such as space, tools, and water” (Glover, 2003, p. 191). Community gardens organized at the grassroots level have been successful in revitalizing urban neighborhoods by creating a sense of community among neighbors from different ethnic backgrounds and across generations (Glover, 2003). A community garden prevents stereotyping and promotes respect for diversity by bringing people together on common ground.

Community gardens create social capital (Glover, 2003; Needham, 2008). Social capital can be understood as reciprocal bonds and bridges among individuals (Putnam, 2000). Urban senior adults often become isolated from younger people in their communities, which can lead to negative stereotyping between the generations (Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002). Moreover, only 14% of Americans say it is “common to come across friendly, helpful, respectful young people” (Duffett, Johnson, & Farkas, 1999, p. 4). But community gardens can foster relationships among residents and create a sense of community connectedness (Needham, 2008; Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002). The creation of a community vegetable garden can function as both a primary and secondary intervention when designed to bring together emerging adults and senior adults through volunteer opportunities, community celebrations, and enhanced physical infrastructure in the neighborhood. This type of intergenerational bridging is beneficial to individuals and to the community (Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002).

Intergenerational interaction enhances social organization when older generations communicate values and norms to younger generations (Keys, 1987). In “The Eight Ages of Man,” Erikson (1950) posits that young adults engage in a period of self-focus, attempting to reconcile isolation and intimacy. These “emerging adults” (see Arnett, 2000) between 18 and 25 years old, can benefit from the wisdom of elders through the bridging and

A primary goal of the community garden is to develop shared ownership of a new collective community resource, and in the process, enhance community connections.
bonding available in a community garden. In the same way, according to Erikson’s model, senior adults can reconcile stagnation or despair with the generativity fostered by connections with younger generations. For example, retired seniors experience reduced social connections and need opportunities to share and be productive. Involvement in a community garden can motivate senior adults to spend less time in their homes and more time out in the community.

**Developing a community garden: A role for the community psychologist**

The goals of a community garden are consistent with Cowen’s (1994) routes to wellness by “(a) creating settings and social environments that favor wellness; and (b) promoting empowering conditions that offer people justice, hope, and opportunity” (p. 156). The five goals of a community garden are to: 1) provide an opportunity for emerging adults to observe and internalize conventional values and behaviors; 2) give senior adults an opportunity to be socially and meaningfully involved in the community, and observe the commitment and competence of emerging adults; 3) create an enhanced sense of community among racially, ethnically, and generationally diverse individuals; 4) positively impact social problems such as intergenerational and cross-cultural conflict, and finally, 5) add to the community food supply.

People of all ages improve their emotional well-being by helping others (Fredrickson, 2009). With the assistance of a community psychologist, a volunteer garden can be organized with a governing body of three senior and three emerging adults. This intergenerational body can lead community gardeners in making decisions regarding collaboration with internal and external resources, assignment of gardening pairs and plots, the system of purchasing supplies and equipment, and the scheduling of gardening tasks. Of particular importance, this group of leaders will guide decisions regarding sustainability and the division of the harvest so that the garden can effectively contribute to food production for the community. Further, to maximize the potential of building intergenerational connections, one emerging adult and one senior adult could be matched to work together and share responsibility for a single plot within the garden.

In addition to plants, tools, supplies, and prizes for gardener participants, to develop and sustain an urban community garden funding can also be effectively used to finance roles for key stakeholders, such as a community psychologist, a garden expert, and a contractor. The community psychologist can initiate the project by identifying funding, securing land in a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood, by establishing a community research panel and evaluation plan, and by publicizing the project to recruit participants. At the outset of the project, a contractor can prepare the earth, stake out individual garden plots, and install water spigots, sheds, and mulch paths. Finally, a gardening expert is needed to provide community members a general orientation to gardening, plant choices, supplies, and tools. This expert will review and approve plot plans, assist with initial planting of the garden, and thereafter, serve as a community garden resource. Ideally, this expert would be readily available in the beginning when the garden is planted, and would thereafter be accessible via phone, and onsite at least one day per week throughout the gardening season.

The community psychologist is especially essential for the organization of an evaluation process to assess the implementation and outcomes of the community garden, which can help to secure funding for sustainability. Chavis’ Sense of Community Index (See References) would be an appropriate assessment measure to include as a quantitative pre- and post-test. At the end of the first growing season, some participants should also be interviewed to obtain qualitative data regarding intergenerational, cross-cultural, and hopefully, empowering experiences. This evaluation process can be repeated each year. In addition, a seasonal evaluation of the health and productivity of the garden by the expert gardener will also be important to assess for ecological sustainability and to track the contribution of the garden to the neighborhood’s food supply.

A primary goal of the community garden is to develop shared ownership of a new collective community resource, and in the process, enhance community connections. To achieve this aim of improved social capital through the garden, it is suggested that members of the governing body plan regular garden festivals during the growing season to share food and culture. A final yearly harvest fest, perhaps during the Thanksgiving period, could provide the opportunity to give thanks as a community. The harvest fest may feature prizes for such achievements as the biggest tomato or most attractive garden, according to the wishes of the community gardeners. The participation of the broader community in these celebrations should be encouraged to promote the sense of community beyond the gardeners and enhance sustainability of the project. Over time, the participants might also consider the concept of a community vegetable market for the purpose of generating revenue or to help distribute the garden yield to the community. Neighborhood residents – diverse young adults, seniors, and their families – can experience increased well-being, more meaningful human relations, and an overall enhanced sense of community through the creation of their community garden.
The nomination deadline for the next award is April 15, 2011.

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All letters and supporting materials should be sent electronically to: Judy Primavera (jprimavera@fairfield.edu); also, please utilize the same e-mail address for questions or call (203)506-5003

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References


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