

A Beautiful Thing: A Service Learning Partnership Develops

This roundtable presents multiple perspectives on a multi-year partnership between an urban school and its university neighbor. Building and nurturing a thriving mutually beneficial partnership between an urban Pre-K-8 school and its neighboring university is, as the principal of XX school often says, “a beautiful thing.” XX school, serving 800 students and families from a multilingual, multiethnic community in a low-income neighborhood, is located a stone’s throw from a mid-sized suburban, private university that attracts undergraduate and graduate students with little personal firsthand experience with racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity, or of poverty and its challenges. “Geographical neighbors, yet worlds apart” would aptly describe the university school juxtaposition before we embarked upon our partnership. Transforming a coincidental proximity into a deep partnership has been a journey of many discoveries.

Our intercultural “contact zone” has been an exciting space for building trust, interdependence, and transformation. During the proposed roundtable discussion, university and community partners will discuss aspects of the partnership process and outcomes that have intersected to enact this “contact zone” of possibility and transformation. A historical context will be provided in which to understand the mutual needs of the partners and the activities that mark the development of our close relationships (grant writing, service learning courses, advisory boards, internship programs, professional development, and community-drenched teacher education). Student learning outcomes of the XX school and university students will be noted, informed by the scholarship on identity development in teacher education and multicultural education.

We draw on Mary Louise Pratt’s conceptualization of a “contact zone” (Pratt, 1991) a space where the intersections of interculturality prompt new understandings, personal and institutional transformations, and upon an anthropologically informed notion of liminality, a fluid movement among past, current and future realities (Cook-Sather, 2006) where multiple identities are tried on and enacted. Our partnership has been deeply influenced and informed by transactional and transformational aspects of community engagement and service learning, with its emphasis on reciprocity amongst partners (Clayton, Bringle, Senior, Huq & Morrison, 2010) and the Jesuit ideology of service, “men and women for and with others” (Kolvenbach, 1986). We have been further guided by the goals of prejudice reduction and working toward equity for all citizens, hallmarks of multicultural education (Grant & Sleeter, 2010). College students must develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to live and participate effectively as global citizens in a complex democracy. This partnership is a way to prepare students for positive social engagement with issues of social justice and diversity (Burrell Storms, 2012).

Our reflections are anchored in participant observation, grounded theory and upon the principles of participatory action research that have structured the partnership. Participatory action research (PAR) is collaborative and participatory and highlights the importance of incorporating the voices of those who are affected by the issue examined or who can affect the outcome of the process (Burrell Storms, 2013; String, 2008). PAR seeks to “bring together action and reflection, theory and practice” (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p.1) to empower and enhance the lives of individual persons and communities (Burrell Storms, 2013).

The case study of this partnership, a vivid example of the conference theme of collaborations for learning and empowerment, offers a practical example to session participants of the interpersonal and organizational-structural aspects of a thriving university-school community partnership, and thus contributes to our collective knowledge of the value of such partnerships for personal and collective transformation. Our session participants will locate the intersections of experience, culture, personal and professional identities visible in the partnership case study, discuss implications and applications to their own experiences, and imagine possible next iterations. They will visualize their own partnership and transformative possibilities, and will be able to consult with any of the session presenters as needed.

References

- Burrell Storms, S. (2013). "It just opened my eyes": The long-term influence of action research on teacher candidates' practice. Unpublished manuscript.
- Burrell Storms, S. (2012): Preparing students for social action in a social justice education course: What works? *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(4), 547-560.
- Clayton, P., Bringle, R., Senor, B., Huq, J., & Morrison, M. (2010). Differentiating and assessing relationships in service learning and civic engagement: Exploitative, transactional, or transformational. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Spring 2010.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Newly betwixt and between: revising liminality in the context of a teacher preparation program. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37, 110-127.
- Grant, C., & Sleeter, C. (2010). Race, class, gender, and disability in the classroom. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (7th ed., pp. 233–256.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Kolvenbach, P. H. K. (1986). *The characteristics of Jesuit education*. In *The characteristics of Jesuit education* (pp. 1-39).
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Luke, A. (1995/1996). Text and discourse in education: An introduction to critical discourse analysis. In Michael Apple (ed.) *Review of Research in Education*, 21, 3-28. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Pratt, M.L. (1991) Arts of the contact zone, *Profession*, 33-40.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2006). Introduction: Inquiry and Participation in search of a world worthy of human aspiration. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *The Handbook of action research: The concise paperback edition* (pp. 1-14). Los Angeles: Sage Publications
- Stringer, E. (2008). *Action research in education* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.