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Ethel Nicdao
ethel.nicdao@csusb.edu

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Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy: Reflections on Teaching SOC3020 Introduction to Community-Based Research

ABSTRACT: This article is a reflection on exploring pedagogical strategies to develop and design content for a new course, SOC3020 Introduction to Community-Based Research (CBR). Content includes interdisciplinary discussion on CBR, reflections on undergraduate research, and considerations for teaching CBR to undergraduate Sociology majors.

INTRODUCTION

The initial proposal submitted for the Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy was “Faculty Learning Community using Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to enhance community engagement for faculty, students, and community stakeholders”. Beginning academic year 2020-21, a new required course for Sociology majors will be offered, SOC3020 Introduction to Community-Based Research. As a result, I was interested in proposing a FLC-CBPR with my Sociology colleagues (Villegas and Munoz) because we are scheduled to be on rotation to teach SOC3020. The overarching goal of the FLC-CBPR was to discuss pedagogical strategies to develop and design content with a community- engaged and project-based learning component. Because service-learning pedagogy called community-based research (CBR) is interdisciplinary, I invited two other faculty members from Psychology (Chavez) and Social Work (Lanesskog) to join the FLC-CBPR.

The FLC-CBPR objectives were designed to align with CSUSB’s strategic goal on Community Engagement and Partnership (Goal #4): “*Serve and engage communities (local, regional, state, national, global) to enhance social, economic and cultural well-being.*” Additionally, the FLC-CBPR objectives complement CSUSB’s strategic values of Social Justice and Equity, student success (Goal #1) and faculty success (Goal #2). Our CBPR-FLC objectives were:

1. Engagement around a set of scholarly readings: the FLC-CBPR faculty members will read a set of interdisciplinary scholarly readings on CBPR, community engaged work, and project-based learning. Proposed format of meetings: weekly meetings to convene FLC-CBPR faculty throughout the term.
2. FLC-CBPR members will engage in discussions to apply specific pedagogical approaches that will allow faculty to incorporate CBPR content and project-based learning in courses.

3. Develop new course syllabi with CBPR-specific assignments, projects, and/or modules. FLC-CBPR faculty members will provide feedback on all syllabi with the goal of sharing all syllabi on the CSUSB ScholarWorks website.
4. Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the FLC-CBPR and present findings at a professional conference and/or publish a brief in a community engagement journal.

REFLECTION ON FLC-CBPR

Feb-March 2020: The FLC-CBPR group held two in-person meetings and three ZOOM virtual meetings due to the pandemic and the state's Stay At Home Order. By the end of March, three faculty members were unable to continue participating in the FLC-CBPR.

The FLC-CBPR meetings revealed the excitement and commitment of FLC-CBPR faculty members to discuss discipline-specific theories and approaches to CBR. Common themes and varied pedagogical strategies across disciplines enriched the discussions and the potential to develop cross-listed courses and co-teaching CBR courses. There was consensus on intentionally focusing on underserved communities, understanding the social context of developing and building community partnerships, the challenges and rewards of collaborative work with communities, the role of higher education institutions in supporting CBR, and the time intensive nature of doing CBR, teaching, scholarship, and service commitments.

The readings and PSY387 Community Psychology syllabus (Chavez) shared by FLC-CBPR faculty members highlighted many valuable practices and approaches to doing CBR and incorporating it into our teaching and research. CBPR is an approach to research that recognizes the community as an equal and contributing partner. Core principles of CBPR include building trust, building on the strengths and resources in the community, fostering co-learning and capacity building, and action that mutually benefits all partners.¹ Although the use of CBPR as an approach to research has largely been conducted in public health research, sociologists are drawn to CBPR as an orientation to research because of social justice principles and the pursuit for social change.² Sociologists recognize existing power imbalances and are critical of practices that may perpetuate inequalities. Some universities with Sociology service-learning programs have developed pedagogy and innovative "promising practices" to minimize the harmful effects on communities and instead design projects that positively impact communities and community organizations.³ CBPR principles are evident in social work and psychology research too.

The use of CBPR in social work research includes one strategy called asset-based community development (ABCD) in which a community identifies its assets (individual, economic, physical, cultural, etc.) to develop solutions for social issues in their community. The technique of asset mapping is conducive to social work's strengths-based approach rather than a deficit-based framework, and in CBPR the community and academic partners collaboratively engage in the process to take inventory of the assets.⁴ Moreover, there are advantages to using a CBPR framework in psychology research. An equitable partnership with communities can strengthen psychology's ethical framework, including principles of fidelity and responsibility. And while CBPR is less common and mainstream in psychology research, CBPR has the potential to increase effectiveness and appropriateness of psychology interventions for communities.⁵

REFLECTION ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Apr-May 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic and sudden conversion to virtual teaching resulted in the dissolution of the FLC-CBPR. As a result, I was given approval in early April to convert the FLC-CBPR to an Individual Faculty Project.

How do we engage our students in research? I listened to four podcasts from <https://teachinginhighered.com/episodes/> that provided valuable insight from various perspectives. First year experience (FYE) programs are common at universities and designed to support the transition of freshmen into college life. Dr. Thia Wolf ([Episode 101, Public Sphere Pedagogy](#)), Director of FYE at CSU Chico, explained why **public sphere pedagogy** matters. She cited sociologist Dr. Vincent Tinto who argued that college students need to have experiences and rites of passage while in college. She provides two examples (the Chico Great Debate and the Town Hall Meeting) where students engage in the public sphere, develop their oral and written skills, and address public issues and possible policy solutions.

What does student research look like? Dr. Bethany Usher ([Episode 027, Teaching through Student Research](#)) spoke about **authentic research** and described when faculty and students do not know the answers. It is precisely when a gap in knowledge is identified by students that they can learn and choose to pursue exploratory research projects. As faculty, we want to encourage and support students to identify the gaps in research and present at conferences like the [National Conference on Undergraduate Research](#). Importantly, we must also recognize the challenges of mentoring undergraduate research, especially for faculty with heavy teaching loads and expectations for research productivity.

REFLECTION ON PLANNING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH FOR SOCIOLOGY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

As a sociologist, social justice and social change are deeply embedded in my own teaching and research. According to Dr. Zuleyka Zevallos, “policies and practices in higher education should address the concepts of intersectionality, equity, diversity, inclusion and access”.⁶ In [Episode 221, On the Other Side of Freedom](#) DeRay Mckesson refers to writing in his book that “language is often our first act of resistance”. We cannot simply talk about social justice and social change. He further elucidates that proximity is necessary to resolve issues like systemic racism or mass incarceration. We cannot live or act in abstract ways to address problematic issues because it is not productive. We need real action and change our beliefs and behaviors.

Where do we begin with community-based research for Sociology undergraduate students? We start in the classroom. Dr. Bryan Dewsbury ([Episode 215, Teaching as an Act of Social Justice and Equity](#)) shared that his teaching style is based on establishing trust, building relationships and a sense of community in his classes. The **social context of learning** means that “teaching for liberation and teaching for inclusiveness, you are incorporating new voices, the actual voices of the students in how you design the curriculum”. The time and the skills to make lasting effective social change is a long-term commitment.

CBPR is also a long-term commitment. My experiences with CBPR projects have shown me that community-academic partnerships take time to develop, and it can take up to a year to establish relationships with community stakeholders.⁷ Where and how do students fit into CBR? “A desire to help is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for community-based research action”.⁷ Much work is required of faculty prior to and while teaching an Introduction to Community-Based Research course. Given the limitation of a 15-week semester, faculty must train and prepare students to enter and engage with communities. Students may be limited in their knowledge about research methodology, a community’s history, political and economic power (or lack of), power and resource inequality of universities and communities, timeframe for IRB approval, and so on.³

I envision CBR for undergraduates to take place over the course of two or more semesters. Elements of the First Year Experience can be built into the curriculum. In their sophomore year, students would continue focusing on principles of responsibility, collaboration, equitable partnerships, social justice, civic and community engagement, etc. in their courses. Partnering with the Office of Community Engagement would be especially beneficial. As juniors, students can be assigned to student learning communities (SLC) with faculty mentors across disciplines. To allow time to develop a

partnership, each SLC would work directly with a specific community organization over the course of two semesters (first semester could be an Introduction to Community-Based Research, followed by an applied internship at a community organization). The CBR project will culminate with a senior seminar course or senior honors thesis designed to benefit the community organization assigned to them.

CBR for undergraduates has great potential to “awakening the soul”.⁸ As Dr. Drewbury wrote. “...I learned the value not of content delivery, but of what it means to teach someone to believe they could be better than what they thought they imagined. This belief is the fire that propels ordinary individuals to do great things.”⁸ Through my teaching and research, I am compelled to continue and contribute to “awakening the soul” of students.

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Other suggested resources:

https://www.aapcho.org/resources_db/cbpr-toolkit/

<https://cbprtoolkit.org/>

<https://compact.org/community-engaged-learning/>

<https://compact.org/podcast/>

<https://www.detroiturc.org/general-cbpr.html>

<https://prevention.ucsf.edu/resources/community-based-participatory-research-toolbox>

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