A Community Narration Assessment of Master's Level Psychology Students at Antioch University Los Angeles

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background in theaters and summer camps. *Connie Yang,* is an MA Clinical Psychology student specializing in Applied Community Psychology at Antioch University Los Angeles. She currently receives her Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) training at South Central Training Consortium, working with children and families at a school-based site in South Los Angeles. Her heart is in the prevention of unnecessary traumas and oppression, as well as strengthening communities. Passionate about storytelling, Connie gravitates toward spaces that create authenticity, vulnerability, and connection. She has worked and volunteered for several nonprofits that center around storytelling for social impact. She is deeply interested in understanding power dynamics and empowering human beings to live fulfilling lives. *Tanya Barr,* is an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist working for a non-profit child and youth community mental health agency and as an Associate with the Narrative Counseling Center, NCC in Los Angeles, CA. Tanya is dedicated to providing equitable access to mental health that is centered in social justice. She is also passionate about holistic healthy lifestyles and has focused her work toward empowering individuals, families, and communities towards resiliency, mental health, meaning, and purpose. Tanya graduated with her M.A. in Clinical Psychology with a focus in Applied Community Psychology from Antioch University.

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Applied Community Psychology (ACP) is a specialty field of study in the Master's of Arts in Clinical Psychology (MAP) at Antioch University Los Angeles (AULA). Students participate in classes and workshops that present theory along with opportunities for real life application. In the Spring 2019 quarter, eight students were enrolled in a Community Narration (CN) approach workshop to learn the theory and practice of facilitating the CN. The students used CN to discover commonalities and differences in their experiences as students of AULA. They created a community narrative which expressed the culture of students at AULA. In addition, the students learned how to conduct CN in the community with application in program evaluation and consultation. A discussion of the results of the community narrative that emerged is described, and implications for faculty and administrators are presented.

The CN Approach (Olson & Jason, 2011) was designed to facilitate community building in organizations. CN is a participatory activity in which members create the narrative of the organization. Group participants begin with personal stories, or narratives, about their experiences in the organization. CN strives to empower participants to discover the organization's goals and deepen understanding of the strengths and challenges. CN can be used as part of the beginning of an evaluation process to assess, plan or solve problems in an organization.

CN has been used in previous research in community settings such as a convention for a member-run organization (Olson & Jason, 2011), non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, and community banks (G.V. Sarkisian, personal communication, April 26, 2020). Participants engage in discussions concerning the organizations' culture in order to foster understanding and facilitate change. CN begins with telling personal stories which people experience as enjoyable and uplifting (Olson & Jason, 2011). Participants in the non-profit organizations felt a sense of individual purpose during this phase. As they shared and found commonalities in the narratives, participants discovered the group's identity, values and collective beliefs. In these cases, the members of the organizations participated without leadership. At the conclusion, the facilitators presented the written report to leadership. It provided them with a qualitative strength-based evaluation. Olson and Jason's (2011) approach contributes to the tools available to facilitate empowerment evaluations, however in a review of the literature, no other examples of the CN Approach were identified. This paper summarizes the experience of students involved in the CN Approach workshop as it pertains to their time at AULA. It identifies the values of AULA and how the students experienced the culture of the university.

Methods

Participants

The participants consisted of Master of Arts of Clinical Psychology Program (MAP) students at Antioch University Los Angeles (AULA). Seven of the students were in the Applied Community Psychology (ACP) specialization, one student was in the General Practice specialization. All participants identified as female, ranged in age from 26 to 56, and racially identified as 1 Afro-Caribbean, 1 Black, 1 Korean American, 3

Caucasian, and 2 undisclosed. Participants and students are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Organization and Setting

Participants were from the MAP program at AULA tasked with training to become Masters-level Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT) and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCC). Gregor V. Sarkisian, Ph. D., a professor at AULA, was the instructor in the CN workshop. The workshop was a one-day (8 hour) class introducing students to the background and theory of CN with the end goal being the development of a community narrative reflection of the student experience. The mission was to engage in an experiential run of a CN so that the students learn the process of facilitating this intervention in community and organizational settings.

AULA is a commuter campus located in Culver City that has at the core of its mission statement a commitment to social justice and equity. In addition to the one campus in Los Angeles there are four campuses located within the US (Seattle, New England, Santa Barbara) along with an online track. All of the campuses are governed by an office in Yellow Springs, OH. The authors of this paper were currently enrolled as students in the MAP program as both full time and part time students. We are organizationally independent of AULA although our relationship with the University is involved and intense as we have financial and professional vested interests in the MAP program. We do not consider ourselves "consultants" for the organization.

Procedure

The CN exercise began with members of the class gathered together in the classroom. The descriptions and time frames are specific to the evaluation process that took place at AULA and can be used as a framework for

future evaluation experiences. The following eight phases describe the process in full:

Phase 1 – Introduction. The session began with the instructor providing history and understanding to the CN Approach and identified Antioch University Los Angeles (AULA) as the binding community of the group of participants. Next, the importance of storytelling was emphasized as a means to determine the common community constructs within the group (Olson & Jason, 2011). The goal as AULA students was to identify a personal highlighting or defining moment at AULA and prepare to share their story of that experience. This phase lasted approximately fifteen to thirty minutes.

Phase 2 - Gathering in Subgroups. Students were broken up into groups of 2-3 people at random throughout the room. Group members were asked to introduce themselves. This phase moved quickly with the support of the facilitator and took five minutes.

Phase 3 - Sharing Stories. Each group was asked to take approximately five minutes per person to describe in detail their "high point", a personal story about their most favorable experience while attending AULA. This would be the moment that most closely defined for them their experience at AULA. The instructor walked around the room, listening in on discussions and answering questions as they arose. Students were then asked to wrap things up after thirty minutes.

Phase 4 - Identifying Commonalities. The next phase involved finding the commonalities across stories within each group. Each of the groups were asked to identify in 2-3 words the commonality of their stories. The result of this process was to allow for the stories to be qualitatively broken down into a manageable body of work. As described in Kelly's (1955) methodology, the idea was to create community constructs from the individual constructs. Participants were encouraged to

associate quickly, and not take too much time finding these commonalities; this took approximately ten minutes. Examples of the commonalities included fulfillment, making a difference, a sense of purpose, connectedness.

Phase 5 - Voting on Commonalities. As the commonalities became more evident and some redundant, such as useful and applied learning, they were clustered and eventually condensed into fewer constructs. As the groups identified their commonalities, these terms were written down on the left side of the whiteboard, leaving the right side of the whiteboard clear for the opposite or bipolar constructs to be identified and documented later. The group voted to reduce and combine once more. For example, creativity and passion were combined to form the construct inspiration. The group defined this as the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something creativity. This left eighteen primary constructs. Constructs receiving no votes such as symbiotic relationship were removed from the board. Those receiving only one vote, such as self-discovery and humanizing sadness and pain, were then removed from the board. This brought the final number of constructs down to eight, which were a sense of community, empowered, authentic relationships, safe space, minority visibility, real world usefulness, inspiration, and excellent curriculum.

Phase 6 - Identifying Bipolar Constructs. The group worked collectively to identify bipolar constructs by developing terms that reflected the opposite meaning from the original constructs. There was discussion among the group as the importance of weighing and choosing the right terms, terms that conveyed the perceived feelings of the community were selected. Notably, the participants spent a significant amount of time finding the bipolar concept for the construct "real world usefulness". The group took a great deal of satisfaction landing on the word **obfuscation**, and felt it expressed moments of learning that

can be confusing, disorienting and created environments that students struggled to find relevance in. When the group arrived upon a decision, there was an excitement and an overall camaraderie that developed. Phases five and six combined were allotted approximately one hour to reach a community consensus.

Phase 7 - Rating Bipolar Constructs. A survey was constructed, adding a seven-point scale between each bipolar construct, and then distributed to identify individual ratings of where participants fall in the bipolar constructs. This phase was developed by the instructor, used through experience applying the tool in his community practice and is not included in the Olson and Jason (2011) article. Each of the participants were asked to vote individually by secret ballot. The votes were then collected, and the ratings were copied onto the whiteboard, allowing all participants to see the results as a whole to prepare for the final discussion. This phase, which was thirty minutes in length, is helpful in collaborating with communities to track changes in a narrative of the same community over time.

Phase 8 - Group Discussion. The results of the voting process were then discussed in great detail, and the overall sense of the class was that, due in large part to the quality of the instructors at AULA, along with the authenticity of the students who attend, the overall experience is positive. However, several areas of improvement were also identified, and it was agreed that some change is strongly suggested with regard to the structure and standards of the University overall. The discussion section below summarizes an hour-long wrap up of the group's experience and the important outcomes of the CN Approach experience.

Results

Table 1 presents the bipolar constructs as well as the ratings on each construct

indicating where participants see the MAP Program now on each bipolar construct.

Numbers represent how many students marked the same area on the scale.

Table 1
Community narrative method dichotomies listed in rank-order by vote

Alternative AULA Higher Education Constructs	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Dominant Traditional Higher Education Constructs
Sense of community	1	2	4	*	*	1	*	Isolation
Empowered	*	2	2	3	*	*	*	Oppression
Authentic relationships	*	1	3	3	1	*	*	Distant relationships
Safe space	1	2	3	1	*	*	*	Toxic space
Minority visibility	*	*	1	6	*	1	*	Marginalization
Real world usefulness	1	4	*	1	1	*	*	Obfuscation
Inspiration	*	1	4	*	1	1	*	Apathy
Excellent Curriculum	1	4	3	*	*	*	*	Irrelevant curriculum

Note: *Table 1 shows the themes that Antioch University Los Angeles students have gathered from their experiences in the Master of Arts Clinical Psychology program, and the opposite term to create a dichotomy. The dichotomy was formed so that students were able to create an interval scale and mark which they felt best represented their experience. The numbers represent how many students marked the same area on the scale.*

Discussion

According to Olson and Jason (2011), CN assists a community to clarify group culture, values and identity. The primary strengths of the approach are designed to empower and center the experience on the participants of the program. This approach is particularly effective in graduate level psychology programs because it engages the skills that are actively being honed throughout the educational experience. AULA focuses on process, and the students in this program are well suited to listening deeply to each other's stories. The CN approach sets the tone to center the participants as a valued factor in their process. Their personal stories became the foundation for the shared commonalities, bipolar constructs, and evaluation. CN engaged participants to be the expert of their own experience no matter their ranking within the organizations. Using Kelly's (1955) bi-polar constructs, the group created a narrative story to interpret their experiences. The following is a review of what each construct meant specifically to the group of participants exploring their community narrative as students at AULA.

Sense of Community vs. Isolation

This bipolar construct garnered the most votes amongst the group. According to participants, this construct referred specifically to a shared sense of purpose, strong individual and networked relationships, inviting spaces to mingle informally on campus, as well as the process-oriented content of curriculum. AULA is an institution committed to social justice, and each class is designed to consider diversity, bias, and issues of privilege and oppression.

Specializations and cohorts allow students to continue learning together throughout their educational journey and build ongoing relationships. The campus has many social spaces that invite informal conversations building on conversations started in class. Additionally, the university sends emails regarding community events that invite students to participate in discussions, art events, and lectures. These events foster a sense of community and self-expression outside the classroom. Strong relationships

with advisors can also aid in the sense of the academic community at AULA.

In contrast, the participants identified experiences of isolation when students are unable to join in this community. Barriers include students enrolled in General Practice specialization (lacking community of a specialization) or who take advantage of flex scheduling (lacking a cohort). The nature of the commuter campus can create a sense of isolation by students who are unable to spend as much time on campus in informal settings. While process-oriented education allows for experiential and intrapersonal learning, classes that are led by professors who are unable to contain the emotional experiences in the room can leave students feeling very alone with unprocessed emotions.

Empowered vs. Oppressed

According to the AULA website (2019) the mission states, "Antioch University provides learner-centered education to empower students with the knowledge and skills to lead meaningful lives and to advance social, economic, and environmental justice."

Antioch's mission statement conveys the commitment that students experience empowerment in their education. Participants reported that Antioch offers accessibility to higher education by providing flexible schedules, financial aid, and scholarships for textbooks and travel to conferences. These opportunities have empowered them to pursue graduate studies while working and transitioning careers. Professors respond to student's needs and encourage students to advocate for themselves while at AULA. This allows students to practice the skills to advance justice while in school.

Participants discussed the feelings of oppression while attending AULA. Several participants discussed the difficulties of transporting to AULA, given its location close to the 405 Freeway and congested major streets. Many reported being instructed by adjunct faculty with clinical experience in a wide variety of settings, but no experience teaching at AULA. This led them to feel distressed and powerless in the quest to receive high quality instruction. Some noted that the administration was not responsive to feedback about the classes. All participants discussed the two tuition raises in six months as oppressive and discouraging.

Authentic Relationships vs. Distanced Relationships

The group of participants defined authentic relationships as professors bringing themselves as human beings and showing up as a whole person to class rather than only as a professional therapist or as a professor, including the mistakes they have made during therapy sessions with their clients. Sharing mistakes makes professors look humble and more human. Furthermore, authentic relationships were defined as professors being invested and genuinely interested in their students' learning. Professors appreciate their students' growth and students' willingness to be vulnerable. Professors cultivate a brave space for students to be open and vulnerable. In addition, students are showing up as a whole person rather than only being in the role of a student.

The group operationalized distant relationships as professors providing limited or not enough office hours, having jaded attitudes, being inaccessible or unavailable to students such as providing slow to no response to students' emails or concerns in person, and applying rigid and clinical boundaries with the students as they would do with their clients.

Safe Space vs. Toxic Space

Participants identified many experiences in which the professor managed the classroom

well. This promoted feelings of safety which encouraged them to authentically share their experiences to deepen their learning. When the participants understood clear boundaries, they felt free to disclose thoughts and observations pertinent to the course material. When the participants felt challenged by the rigors of graduate school and clinical training, they felt supported by experienced instructors. They noted that they appreciated encouragement about self-care, in particular.

When an inexperienced or incompetent instructor mismanaged the classroom, participants experienced the classroom as a toxic space. This included, but was not limited to, microaggressions, and discrimination by classmates and/or instructors. In addition, if the instructor lacked the skills to reset boundaries, the participants felt that they had no support. This was particularly true if a student disclosed personal thoughts or feelings that were negated or ignored by classmates and the instructor. If the instructor was not able to provide alternatives to the students, then it was not safe to authentically participate in class.

Minority Visibility vs. Marginalization

Participants identified minority visibility as a value that they shared with AULA's mission and for the majority of the group, was one of the main attractions to apply to this particular university. The group had a shared sense of appreciation for the university's empowerment of students to "call out" forms of prejudice and oppression, such as (but not limited to) racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ageism, ableism, and other forms of dehumanizing belief systems.

According to the group, however, while the university is successful in stating this value and encouraging students to identify these belief systems in order to increase minority visibility, there is an expressed need for more integration of that value in order to prevent

the opposite construct, defined by the group as marginalization. This was proposed to be done in ways such as increased faculty representation, updated curriculum that included modern perspectives from people of color and other marginalized groups, and more accessibility for study abroad opportunities.

Additionally, some of the participants expressed that classmates had the experience of feeling the pressure of having to speak on behalf of the minority group they belonged to, as opposed to feeling like it was a shared responsibility of the class (including the professor). Lastly, in order to address experiences and feelings of marginalization at the university, the need for psychoeducation around how to engage in brave spaces where transparency is still encouraged, but respect and sensitivity to how that transparency may affect others was discussed. It was suggested by participants that this type of learning would be beneficial as a preface to the MAP program's entry course, Society and the Individual, which focuses on raising awareness of one's and others' cultural subjectivities. This could take shape in empowering students with tools for deepening empathy, fostering vulnerability, and effective, compassionate communication. The group believed that with such tools, it would decrease experiences of marginalization in the remaining course of the program.

Real World Usefulness vs. Obfuscation

The group found real world usefulness in the MAP program in several ways. Participants felt that learning from professors who are clinicians gives them an opportunity to gain experience from professionals in the field. Courses that support students to apply theories early on increase the usefulness of the course. Experiential learning and dyadic work contribute to the application of this theory. Students felt AULA's reputation in the

field also supported and encouraged students' learning.

The participants identified several conditions that contributed to obfuscation. Students found frustration in syllabi that assign irrelevant and outdated texts and research. When professors offer too much self-disclosure and individual experiences, this can muddy what is being taught. Students expressed obfuscation when professors speak on too many topics in one class. Additionally, obfuscation was experienced when instructors teach courses that are not related to their field, practice, or area of interest.

Inspiration vs. Apathy

The group identified that inspiration was a part of their narrative around Antioch. Students found professors who share their experiences and wisdom to be inspiring. Professors sharing their passions outside of school and their vulnerabilities (successes and failures) motivate students. The inclusion of a holistic and spiritual dimension into the curriculum provides a feeling of integration. Participants discussed the sacrifices of fellow students as inspirational for the forward momentum needed to complete the MAP program.

The group identified apathy as lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern. The group found that apathy is evident when it comes to the task of improving the school system largely as a result of the brief two-year period for the MAP program. This challenging window of time is generally navigated by focusing on the requirements to complete the program requirements which depletes student energy that could be used to address systemic university issues. This tension often culminates in apathy. The commuter campus is a convenience for the older adult population, but it also presents as a barrier for a sense of campus cohesion, culture and unity which maintains a sense of apathy for confronting systemic change. Additionally,

having to navigate the ever-evolving bureaucratic process of the Antioch system, can result in members of the group feeling unenthusiastic to change.

Excellent Curriculum vs. Irrelevant Curriculum

The group decided that the curriculum was a major factor of what sets Antioch apart from other schools. Each professor brings their own experience and knowledge of class topic and tailors it. This way each professor adjusts and improves curriculum, ensuring it is enhanced. Participating students found that materials presented in most classes are relevant to real life clients and their challenges. Professors are committed to remain up to date with current books and journals. Antioch maintains a wide range of classes that expose students to the needs of a population they may later want to work with. Students get the option to specialize in LGBT Affirmative Psychology, Trauma Studies, Child Studies, Spiritual and Depth Psychology, Applied Community Psychology, Addiction and Recovery, General Practice and even Professional Clinical Counselor courses. These specializations allow the student to get a wide range of curriculum that suits their career path in psychology. With all of these options of class choices, students agree that the classes are flexible which also accounts for what makes it excellent.

With regards to irrelevant curriculum, participants discussed one class in particular. Society and the Individual is a class that is required in the first quarter of the MAP Program. Participants agreed that the materials are outdated, lack theory and academic rigor. Students suggested that the curriculum for this class be reformulated.

Implication for Faculty and Administrators

Specific to this study, the mission of Antioch University is to provide "learner-centered education to empower students with the knowledge and skills to lead meaningful lives

and to advance social, economic, and environmental justice." If faculty and administration are afforded an honest assessment of their program from the vantage point of the student body, one which provides them with the specific areas of deficit and targeted constructs failing to meet the standards of the University, then they would be empowered to realign the academic experience with AULA's mission. Utilizing the information obtained through the CN process, faculty is provided with just such an opportunity: to strategize with members of the student body to develop a course of action focused on moving those constructs from dominant to alternative as the desired outcome. Some examples of putting this practice into action would be as follows:

Beginning with the bipolar construct *Sense of Community vs. Isolation*, the authors suggest AULA engage in community building activities such as virtual events to include students who are unable to participate in events due to distance and transportation challenges. This could lead to more meaningful engagement within the AULA community. If more online space was made available for special interest groups, affinity groups, and for students to share skills and information with one another (possibly through a time bank or by creating bulletin boards for community announcements and opportunities), the students as a whole would develop a stronger sense of community and feel less isolated, even off campus. This is especially important because AULA is a commuter school. Another way to promote inclusion would be to encourage the development of coalitions to operate within individual communities, encouraging students to work alongside their fellow community members to affect change both in the school environment and within their community. Furthermore, instructors are encouraged to reach out to students in class to discuss incidents that have happened during class in order for students to finish processing their emotions while being able to

judge what discussions must be continued in the classroom.

Next, with regard to the constructs of *Empowerment vs. Oppressed*, it is suggested that administrators ensure that faculty are cognizant of the AULA mission and environment. The authors suggest more vetting and training of adjunct faculty to assure that they are an appropriate match for the learner-centered culture of AULA. To ensure access to transportation for all students, AULA may create a carpool message board online so that students traveling from the same areas can carpool as a way to save time, money, and make the trip more social. Collaborative solutions for providing feedback regarding instructors would empower students to engage more fully in their educational process (Wolff, T., 2010). AULA could consider both formal, such as an ombudsperson, and informal channels to encourage participation. To address tuition hike concerns, administrators might discuss tuition openly and provide justification for tuition increases by sharing a transparency report with the AULA community. Administrators could also consider cohort-based tuition which provides incoming students with tuition stability which empowers students during their time at the University.

In considering *Authentic Relationships vs. Distanced Relationships*, faculty and administrators may think how they might be more accessible to students such as the professor who returns emails within twenty-four hours, and virtual office hours. If faculty has an attitude of 'doing time' this may need to be addressed. Faculty could benefit from support of the administration to maintain their own morale and passion for teaching. Advisors may consider minimum requirements to meet with students, for office hours and availability. A reasonable number of advisees may need to be reconsidered. In the spirit of authentic relationships, having transparent communication between faculty

and students helps manage student expectations. Administrators could empower instructors to teach more courses that are truly of interest to them, adding passion and a thriving learning environment for students. This may also encourage authentic interactions between instructors and students.

Within the construct of *Safe Space vs. Toxic Space*, faculty could employ evidence-based practices for cultural competence in the classroom in order to provide a safe and brave space for difficult conversations. Specifically, in process classes, it is helpful if instructors are proficient as facilitators with experience in holding a safe space when the topics are volatile or controversial. In such classes, the boundaries may become clouded if the facilitator does not have a solid background in facilitating conflicts as teachable moments. Hiring instructors who are committed to ongoing self-reflection and growth may be useful in preventing incidents of microaggressions and discrimination. It may also be useful for new/potential hires to be required to shadow identified professors with a proven track record. This process would allow them time to become familiar with the AULA student body and curriculum, which differs from other universities due to the nature of classes taught. Professors could set expectations of self-disclosure at the beginning of process courses and maintain such expectations. When a boundary is crossed, the instructor should be comfortable stopping the conversation so the class can process the boundary violation and move forward on the same page.

In the construct of *Minority Visibility vs. Marginalization*, the university ranked in the middle, indicating a neutral position to advance social justice. AULA states in the Inclusion and Diversity Statement of Commitment that the university seeks to respond to concerns so that no one is marginalized (AULA, 2020). A collaborative approach (Wolff, 2010) could be to engage

faculty, administrators and all minority students, ideally led by minority faculty members and/or alumni, with a goal of ascertaining what can be done to increase minority visibility over marginalization. A coalition of both students and faculty could be empowered to develop and implement a plan of action. AULA could consider engaging in collaborative leadership (Chrislip & Larson, 1994) which promotes shared decision making to facilitate change.

Regarding *Real World Usefulness vs. Obfuscation*, administrators could improve hiring practices to match instructors with their areas of expertise. This is particularly relevant for adjunct faculty in order to provide a more real-world experience for students. AULA could offer financial support to faculty for professional development opportunities in order to increase their knowledge and skill set to improve the student experience. If AULA realized its own mission statement and advanced economic justice within academia, the university would consistently attract a higher caliber of instructors with expertise in the desired subjects. Students are expected to use resources presented within the last five years for their assignments unless a text is foundational to the area of study. If faculty held the same standard to resources in the syllabus, students would have access to the most recent research and conversations about the area of study. Many professors bring professional experience into their classroom to share with students, and this is helpful. Professors should be encouraged to limit self -disclosure in this way in order for classroom conversations to stay on topic and remain relevant to course learning objectives. If courses were scheduled a year in advance, there would be fewer incidents of professors not teaching a class in their area of expertise or being assigned to teach a class with little notice.

For the construct *Inspiration vs. Apathy*, the authors suggest the administration and

faculty formalize communication and feedback channels. AULA could provide collaborative formats to improve the school system and campus cohesion, engaging students in a collaborative community-building processes to explore ways in which AULA can harness its strengths and continue innovation in higher education. Providing students with the option for completing their degree in two years or extending for three to four years without severe fiscal impact may provide a more equitable solution for students who need additional time to complete. This concession might inspire even more students to embark on a journey of educational enlightenment and address systemic university issues. Another example could be for instructors to promote more egalitarian relationships with students through providing a choice of multiple options to demonstrate their knowledge of course content; promoting inspiration through more collaborative ways of learning.

The construct of *Excellent vs. Irrelevant Curriculum* explored areas of the curriculum that are irrelevant. If students report they are not feeling challenged or that the material being used is no longer relevant, this may be a signal to faculty that it is time to refresh and update the material they are using. If AULA prioritized student feedback and responded in a timely manner, the mission of building a learner-centered community may be more fully realized.

Limitations of the Current Study

One limitation identified is the sample size. The results gathered are based on the experiences of eight students out of approximately 600 registered in the MAP Program. Qualitative data from a larger sample of students would provide a more accurate depiction of the community and enrich the collective narrative of AULA students. Another limitation might be the hesitancy of students to discuss challenges openly throughout the activity, either due to

confidentiality concerns, or due to an expectation that their ideas will not be addressed.

Conclusion

Participants learned the theory and application of the Community Narration approach. They experienced as community members and, in addition, they gained the knowledge to facilitate CN for organizations as consultants. Students learned the techniques to consult while empowering people to understand the organization in order to adapt and change.

It is of note to mention that this was the first time this class had been taught at the Antioch University Los Angeles campus, and this group of students was the first group to participate. At the end of the class, the group was asked to share their experience throughout the assessment. Key aspects were that during the Sharing Stories phase, members felt a sense of camaraderie and intimacy they had not anticipated. Throughout the identification of constructs and voting phases, students expressed additional bonding upon realizing they were not isolated in their feelings – that others in the student body shared the same experiences. Some identified having chosen AULA because of its mission statement and found the school to be lacking in specific areas that were of value to them. At the end of the class, the participating students agreed upon a feeling of empowerment, due in part to the unification process.

As participants, students discovered that their experiences of the constructs generally reflected the mission of AULA. CN deepened their understanding of the values of AULA as it seeks to provide a culture of belonging, empowerment, and justice. This alternative view is in contrast to the dominant narrative of other institutions of higher education. For the most part, participating students felt that AULA succeeds in meeting the mission. Areas

that participants discussed as needing improvement were noted when a student experienced a sense of isolation, marginalization, and apathy of instructors. As stated above, AULA's mission statement expresses its commitment to social justice; this means AULA is not only aware of power and oppression but is committed to dismantling unequal power structures within its organization. CN can be used to cultivate inclusivity and diversity by encouraging students to take agency over their education and learning. Providing a platform where AULA students have a voice encourages and instills empowerment in the AULA community. In addition, both nonprofit and for-profit sectors can use CN to evaluate their programs more effectively and accurately. CN organically encourages authenticity and transparency among all participants, which creates an organizational culture that prioritizes integrity, trust, and human fulfillment.

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