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# Playful Thursday Project: Community/University Partners and Lessons Learned in a Longitudinal Study

Denise Boston, Batya Ross, and Phil Weglarz

## Abstract

Community/university partnerships utilizing expressive arts therapy are in a unique position to offer social and emotional support adapted to the needs and varying situations of culturally diverse children living in distressed urban neighborhoods. This three-year community-based participatory research study investigated the impact of a community/university partnership on master-level counseling students, after-school teachers, and elementary school-age students. Findings suggest that a partnership between a university expressive arts social and emotional learning initiative and a community after-school program serving low-income children and families provides noteworthy benefits for both communities. Lessons learned from this partnership can serve as a model for culturally responsive and systemic community/university collaborations.

According to Wangari Maathai, community activist and environmentalist, “There are opportunities even in the most difficult moments” (retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/266345765442835300/>). Families who live in socio-economically marginalized urban communities face daunting challenges as they attempt to earn an adequate living, negotiate distressed neighborhoods, and raise their children. Despite the challenges of poverty, exposure to crime and negative risk factors, collective efficacy and social cohesion can be a buffer against concentrated poverty (Turner & Rawlings, 2005). Communities with a focus on child advocacy and family-focused services have provided purposeful and proximal processes that nurture and ensure the well-being of the child over time (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The concept of proximal processes involves interrelated systems (i.e., school, home, peer group) and the immediate surroundings that are responsible for the child’s competencies and optimal development. Allahwala, Bunce, Beagrie, Brail, Hawthorne, Levesque, von Mahs, and Visano (2013) contend that “Strong community/university partnerships are particularly important in neighborhoods facing socioeconomic marginalization” (p. 54).

In this paper, we discuss a community/university collaboration and how it was embedded in a pre-practicum course offered in a university Counseling Psychology Program. In the current study, we highlight two important areas: the formation of the community/university partnership and the lessons learned in the Playful Thursday Project (PTP). The PTP was a program designed to provide expressive arts therapy and social-emotional group services in an after-school program. PTP focused on arts intervention and strength-based approaches.

The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2) was used to assess behavioral and emotional strengths of 24 first- and second-grade children baseline and two years after the implementation of the intensive arts and social-emotional services delivered. According to Epstein and Sharma (1998):

Strength-based assessment is defined as the measurement of those emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment, contributing to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults; enhance one’s ability to deal with adversity and stress; and promote personal, social, and academic development (p. 3).

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the literature on community/university partnerships. According to Jakubowski and Burman (2004), community placements provide an interactive complement to an education in the principles and practices relevant to community development. Using a master’s degree service-learning project as an example, we describe best practices and key lessons of a three-year community-based learning program. We begin with the process of establishing a long-term community/university partnership through the integration of a community service-learning component into a Counseling Psychology Program with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy. This paper then illustrates why and how we created this partnership that emphasized the strengths and competencies of school-age children.

## **Community/University Engagement**

In order for community/university partnerships to be effective and purposeful, it is key to build capacity from a culturally responsive approach rooted in humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking (Freire, 1998). Curwood and her associates (2011) stress the importance of assessing university readiness at the pre-partnership stage and ensuring that academic institutions are optimally positioned to engage in effective community research partnerships. The authors define a community/university partnership as “collaborations between community organizations and institutions of higher learning for the purpose of achieving an identified social change goal through community-engaged scholarship and ensures mutual benefit for the community organization and participating students” (p. 16). The California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) Expressive Arts Therapy Program (EXA) formulated a valued and reciprocal relationship with the Glide Foundation Family, Youth, and Childcare Center (FYCC) two years prior to the study’s implementation. FYCC is an extension of Glide Memorial Church, which is located in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco. Under the leadership of Reverend Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani, Glide has been the heart and soul of the Tenderloin since 1963. Together, they have built a radically inclusive church community where all are welcomed, all are equally necessary, and all are offered unconditional love (Williams & Mirikitani, 2012). FYCC is a beacon of light in the socioeconomically marginalized community and in many ways a second home and extended family to the children who attend the various programs in the center. FYCC aims to increase nutritional knowledge and access, support reading development and enjoyment, and expand cultural learning opportunities for children ages 5–10 living in the distressed inner-urban neighborhood. Research has indicated that stressful experiences that are endemic in families living in impoverished communities can alter children’s neurobiology in ways that undermine their health, social competence, and academic success (Thompson, 2014). The FYCC is a community-based center that understands the needs of the children and families in the Tenderloin community and offers a nurturing, educational space for infants and toddlers during the workday and an after-school program for elementary-school-age students. The center is run by a professional team of educators and staff who provide a loving, caring, and nurturing community.

## *CIIS-EXA Program*

The EXA program at the California Institute of Integral Studies is a master’s level counseling program that conceptualizes healing at a personal, interpersonal, and community level. The program’s unique skill set has allowed expressive arts therapy to flourish to the point where it is now being presented in health-care centers, schools, counseling programs, and academic intuitions all over the world. CIIS-EXA prepares students for licensure as Marriage Family Therapists (MFT) and is rooted in the principles and practices of adult learning and development. Students may also elect to take additional coursework to gain eligibility for the Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC) license in California.

The curriculum places a high premium in the power of the arts as tools for human development, social justice, and responsiveness to the needs of children, youth, family, and individuals of diverse psychological and environmental experiences. Students actively engage in an exploration of their own filters and biases and develop competencies in applying diversity and sensitivity in their clinical practice. Knowles and Cole (2008) state that art-based research represents “an unfolding and expanding orientation to qualitative social science that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representation from the arts, broadly defined” (p. xi). The EXA core faculty and adjunct faculty are leaders in the field of expressive arts therapy and representative of diverse backgrounds, research interests, and global outreach engagement.

## *EXA and FYCC Collaboration*

Our initial partnership involved facilitating an arts-based professional development training retreat, led by EXA faculty and students for FYCC administrators, teachers, and staff. The collaboration relied on a reciprocal process that was based on mutually beneficial transactions (Boyer, 1996). Additionally, the EXA program also facilitated numerous expressive arts therapy workshops with children and youth in the after-school program. The community work was a transformative learning experience for the training facilitators, students, FYCC staff, and children. Ultimately, the university’s initiatives established credibility and trust that enabled us to become a community resource for FYCC and moved us into the next phase of our collaboration—an arts-based social and emotional longitudinal research study.

According to Miller, Brown, and Hopson (2011), solidarity is cemented by the recognition that community partners share a common fate and ultimate destinies.

### *Research Conceptualization*

In 2012, the lead investigator met with the FYCC program director, executive team, and teachers to develop a shared understanding of the three-year social and emotional after-school initiative. Since the FYCC after-school program provides learning services for children from kindergarten to fifth grade, it was decided that the expressive arts and social and emotional project would follow the first- and second-grade students over a three-year period. The teachers were trained as workshop co-facilitators with the EXA students. FYCC teachers have played a valuable role in the study due to their knowledge of the children and the considerable time spent with the children during the school year and summer session. The teachers were also trained to administer the BERS-2 (Epstein, 2004), which yields strength quotients and standardized subscale scores that can be classified into one of seven levels (ranging from very poor to very superior). The training sessions took place at FYCC and the teachers met alongside EXA student therapists once a week at CIIS for training and program planning. Parents signed consent forms that provided details about the project initiative.

The EXA program chair and lead investigator developed strategies for student recruitment, structured social and emotional learning (SEL) training, and a pre-practicum field placement experience for second-year EXA graduate students. During this initial stage of the research development process, an EXA graduate was selected to assist the lead investigator throughout the three-year study. The alumna had experience as a FYCC workshop facilitator, which made her a very good fit to work as a collaborator on data collection, record keeping, conducting interviews, administering surveys, coordinating focus groups, and research analysis. During Study Year 1, the EXA department utilized internal resources (faculty course load) for training, research administration, and oversight as well as materials (art supplies, incentives, administration) for workshop session operations. In Study Year 2, the CIIS Development Department worked in collaboration with EXA to generate outside funding to support the study and the community/university collaboration.

Development staff were successful in identifying sources who provided generous funding contributions for the FYCC/EXA community/university research study. The funders extended their contribution in Study Year 3, the final year of the study and the development of the research findings.

### *EXA Student Recruitment*

During the initial phase of the study the CIIS Field Placement Office approved the EXA pre-practicum field placement at FYCC. Once accepted as program facilitators, students enrolled in the practicum course for both semesters and attended weekly supervision classes taught by the EXA faculty supervisor. To ensure a consistent research structure over the three years, the recruitment of student PTP facilitators consisted of identifying second-year Expressive Arts Therapy graduate students who met the following criteria: (a) experience working with children, (b) community service engagement, (c) familiarity in diverse settings, and (d) completion of foundational therapeutic course work. Six students were selected for Study Year 1 (eight weeks fall semester, eight weeks spring semester). The researchers followed the same procedure for Study Year 2 with new students. In Study Year 3 four students were selected.

Each year in the three-year research cycle, new students to the study participated in an orientation process prior to instruction by the lead investigator and supervisor to their immersion into the PTP. The students also volunteered during the FYCC summer full-day program in order to learn more about the culture, engage with elementary-age children and their teachers, and meet the research study cohort group. The summer session experience at FYCC has been extremely valuable in preparing students for the PTP sessions because it provided the groundwork for child-centered engagement and collective SEL and arts-based facilitation.

### *SEL and Clinical Training*

It was critical to train the FYCC/EXA PTP project team together in SEL skill development, arts-based and group art-based intervention, and team building applications in order to establish an intentional and fluid collaborative process. FYCC teachers participated in program development and team building at the university and provided valuable information and updates on the child participants. The purpose of the training was to: (a) outline the SEL objectives and expressive arts

techniques, (b) discuss the roles and responsibilities of the project team, (c) detail each child's social and emotional development, (d) discuss data collection procedures, and (e) establish timelines with the investigative team, and (f) develop a work plan for the culminating student event. The pre-operational training was implemented across the three-year time frame. The FYCC teachers were also trained on the administration of the BERS-2 Teacher Rating Scale on the 24 participants during spring 2013 as a baseline assessment, and during spring 2015 to complete the PTP implementation phase. The teachers in the after-school program have a thorough knowledge of the students' social and emotional strengths and behaviors, and are well situated in administering the rating scale. We also worked as a team to create the name Playful Thursday as a guiding reminder that along with an SEL and creative learning community, we also needed to highlight that the work needed to be guided play, imagination, innovation, and imagery.

#### *Playful Thursday Participants*

The FYCC executive directors identified the first- and second-grade classes as the focus of PTP. Many of the children started attending FYCC as infants and toddlers and several have siblings in the program as well. According to the San Francisco Unified School District School Data ethnic representation of Tenderloin Community Elementary School (TCS) for 2013–2014, 34.9% Hispanic, 13.2% African American, 26.1% Asian, 14% Caucasian, 0.8% American Indian, .08% Pacific Islander, 3.3% multiple races. The ethnic demographic of FYCC attendees is representative of the TCS. The FYCC teachers played a valuable role in identifying the selected children for the study. They assisted the lead investigator in sending the permission forms to the parents and keeping track of the students throughout the three-year period. It was decided that for the first two years of the study, every child would have the opportunity to learn skills in building self-awareness, self-management, and social-awareness, and improve attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school. However, 24 children were selected from both the classes for the study cohort. The study group, like their peers, represented diverse backgrounds racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically. During the third year of PTP, weekly sessions were provided only to the research cohort in a separate room setting. The PTP workshops provided a therapeutic space within which children could express feelings and thoughts

related to the impact of living and attending schools in the Tenderloin. More importantly, through expressive arts theatrical exercises that emphasize different forms of play, movement, and spontaneous expression, the children developed a sense of self-efficacy and cultural awareness (Miller & Billings, 1994).

#### **Program Development**

In terms of program development, the research team utilized the lessons learned in the early encounters with children to optimize past experiences in regard to creative expression, emotional literacy, and relationship building. The previous years of innovative play techniques with the FYCC children were informative and invaluable in understanding the after-school organization, classroom structure, student population, and the Tenderloin community. However, in order to integrate a social-emotional focus, as co-researchers we wanted to explore the impact of adults in helping children identify their strengths, regulate emotions, and create new SEL teaching strategies.

The lead investigator, with the support of the research team, developed SEL and expressive arts curricula appropriate for early school-age children. In addition to describing the procedures used to implement creative strategies that assess elementary school-age children's behavioral and emotional strengths, the present study was designed to achieve the following four objectives. First, we sought to develop and sustain a community/university research partnership adapted and implemented with strength-based data-collection activities. Second, our cross-informant SEL training and research applications enabled us to work purposefully and collaboratively. Third, we infused a parent SEL component facilitated by our trained expressive arts counseling trainees and to extend the knowledge from the classroom to the children's home settings. The sessions were facilitated in Spanish to support our Spanish-speaking parents. Finally, but more importantly, the study pursued a Freirean collaborative learning approach based on the educational practice of enhancing community and building social capital (Freire, 1998).

The PTP was initiated at FYCC in October 2012 with a diverse population of 24 first and second graders. The PTP was integrated into FYCC's after-school program schedule during their Thursday sessions. For three years (2012–2015), children took part in group activities (eight-week fall and spring series) that encouraged cooperation and active participation led by SEL-trained EXA

students and FYCC teachers. The four goals of the strength-based initiative were: (1) provide children with a variety of creative and innovative expressive arts techniques, (2) establish a supportive context in which children could examine positive aspects of their lives, (3) facilitate the development of children's capacity of creative thinking, and (4) encourage children to participate in group activities through the use of play and exercises specifically designed to facilitate social and emotional learning.

The BERS-2 instrument was useful in establishing a baseline of social-emotional learning standards. In addition to this assessment tool, an observation assessment form was created by the research assistant. During the course of the study, children were tracked using this individual weekly strength-based assessment approach. EXA workshop facilitators were responsible for observing an identified child and tracking their social and emotional development over the course of the workshop sessions. We also collected artwork and other materials that were produced by the children during the PTP sessions. In the initial phase of the project a narrative assessment using an approach called the Tree of Life was introduced to assist children to illustrate and share their family roots, personal strengths, and hopes and dreams for the future (Ncube-Mlilo & Denborough, 2007). Children also used emotional check-in images to explore feelings and emotional stressors. There was also an intentional effort to build trusting relationships with the children, highlight strengths, establish a playful environment, and introduce group norms. The culminating activity celebrated the children's first year with a pizza party and an awards ceremony with each child receiving certificates honoring their strengths and special qualities. This process was repeated in the second year with new pre-practicum students.

In the last year of the research study 14 children participated. Within the three years, children had left the FYCC for various reasons. Either they moved on to other after-school programs, enrolled in sports leagues, or moved from the area. The children were now third and fourth graders and in different classroom settings. One teacher left FYCC to pursue her academic aspirations, the teaching assistant remained with the workshop team for continuity, and two new teachers joined PTP. The current formation of teachers administered the BERS-2 instrument a second time with the remaining participants. Four new trained EXA student workshop facilitators were brought into the study. Again, best practices

from the previous years informed the final year. Workshop sessions were designed with the focus on Goal 3: decision-making and responsible decisions. Children were placed in small groups with one lead facilitator. The art activities included creating shadow boxes that honored self and cultural background; short film based on stories the children developed around conflict and resolution; and creating a backdrop and puppets made out of Popsicle sticks.

In Year 3 we also introduced parent SEL sessions. Two of the student trainees from PTP were selected to lead the workshops. Along with their experience facilitating expressive arts groups, both students were ethnically matched to meet the needs of Hispanic parents and guardians. The curriculum replicated, in many ways, the topic areas explored in the Playful Thursday groups in the previous years. Here is one parent's response to the workshop:

I liked it a lot because I could put my feelings in the art I did, the painting we did...it was an activity about a tree...and my tree represents my culture, my roots, my family, and the people in my family who are no longer with us. This helped me a lot to get closer with my physical family...because I have my grandparents who live here, and this helped me a lot to visit them more frequently and to know how they are and be more aware of them...maybe not every day, but more often. And then, and I living in this country, I hardly visited them before, and now I do. And as for those who are gone, I send a picture, a painting, of my aunt who is now gone... and painted her angel wings (cracking voice) and because of that I feel her closer, and even though she is not here I can see this painting of her every day because it is in my room. It makes me emotional but it helps me.

At the end of the parent session, we passed out gift cards to everyone who attended. In the evaluations, parents stated how much they appreciated the time they spent creating their trees as well as the opportunity to play. They also requested that we offer more parent sessions in the future.

The culminating children's event was titled Red Carpet Hollywood. Four short films written and produced by the participants demonstrated collaboration, leadership, cooperation, and critical

thinking. A collective effort went into presenting the children's work. The workshop facilitators shared the stage as emcee, award presenters, and hosts, and developed programs and invitations. The community/university team coordinated the meal and decorations and sent out invitations to the other FYCC classes, families, and Year 1 and Study Year 2 EXA workshop facilitators. The children received awards for their film and representatives from each production created acceptance speeches, which they shared with the audience. The children were proud of their work and very surprised to see workshop facilitators from previous years. The EXA students from previous years were also amazed at the physical growth of the participants as well as the confidence and leadership skills many of the children exhibited.

## Methods

This study used a community-based participatory research methodological approach that involved educators, students, and community partners with the intention of increasing bidirectional connections between academics and communities (Hacker, 2013). In 2012, we began tracking (N=24) first- and second-grade children in the FYCC after-school program. Data were collected at the time of the intervention start-up phases, at which point the BERS-2 Teacher Rating Scale instrument was administered by the FYCC teachers to identify five interrelated social and emotional (SEL) competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. The instrument was also useful in highlighting resilience, as well as the development of strength-based intervention strategies. A weekly child assessment progress form was also created by the research assistant to monitor social-emotional development and optimize positive teacher-student interactions. At the end of the third study year, FYCC teachers administered the instrument a second time to assess (N=17) children's social and emotional development over the multi-year time span.

To obtain feedback from EXA students and FYCC teachers regarding the impact of their university and community experience, they were asked to complete a program evaluation and participate in face-to-face interviews and focus groups during the end-of-year program. The interview guide included five open-ended topics: (a) experience with social and emotional learning, (b) collaboration experience, (c) arts intervention facilitation, (d) social and emotional learning

component, and (e) a wrap-up question to elicit other topics participants may want to discuss. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for accurate and detailed analyses.

## Analysis

The analytic data set included responses from the entire data collection. It was imperative that we establish careful archiving of each step of the analysis to easily locate data for Study Years 1, 2, and 3. The lead investigator and assistant researcher analyzed the transcripts, BERS-2 results, observation notes, evaluations, surveys, and art projects. Distinctive meaning units were illuminated from the data analysis and codes were assigned to each unit. The results brought to our attention several key areas of interest. The first area of consideration focuses on the contextual factors related to the university and its ability and readiness to support a long-term community-based research partnership. The second area of questions is about the experiential learning practices for university students, particularly when building partnerships in low-income urban neighborhoods. The third area of note is related to the impact of arts-based intervention and proximal process of adult services. The fourth and final element of the longitudinal study is community/university sustainable collaboration. In the next area, the findings are structured to present the work in the four categories, along with our responses, lessons learned, and challenges related to each of the identified areas of interest.

## Findings

### *Academic and Institutional Factors*

Based on the lessons learned as they relate to the master level community service component, we recognized that the intentional work that went into restructuring our EXA program curriculum in 2011 made this partnership possible and ensured collaborative university readiness. As a Marriage and Family Counseling program with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy, the entire curriculum had been updated and restructured to be aligned with the new California Board of Behavioral Sciences Marriage and Family Therapist licensure standards. We also simultaneously revised the academic program in order to infuse multicultural content.

The core faculty members have embraced the principles and practices of multicultural counseling and social justice in their pedagogy. Our self-study in 2015 demonstrates positive student outcomes in the areas of cultural competency, community-based

research, and clinical ecosystemic perspectives. We also believe that community service learning is a salient aspect of community-engaged scholarship.

Although the EXA program has made tremendous strides linking curriculum to civic engagement, a considerable disparity still exists between well-represented (i.e., whites, female, non-Pell eligible students) and underrepresented students (i.e., immigrants, students of color, low-income) in our program. Each year our cohort has become more diverse and representative of the global community; however, in relation to the community partnership with FYCC, it has been a challenge for many underrepresented and low-income students to commit themselves to the research endeavor due to their need to work while attending school in the San Francisco Bay area, one of the most expensive cities in the country. Until our university can provide appropriate ways in which all students have an equal opportunity to take part in community service knowledge, we are very confident that our multicultural curriculum will foster cultural humility in the classroom, prepare students for the challenge of communicating and interacting with diverse populations, and create a moral and civic community.

As a counseling program, EXA is very fortunate to have the support of the institution in regard to the Glide FYCC study with faculty course load, pre-practicum field placement, and other internal resources. For the last two years, the Office of Development has been instrumental in assisting the researchers in successfully allocating funding. The first was a grant awarded to support three parent SEL workshops in Study Year 2. The one-and-a-half-hour session was facilitated in Spanish, aimed to provide Hispanic parents of children in the FYCC the tools to improve their children's social and emotional literacy. In Study Year 3, a financial gift covered project administration, FYCC programming, and the final report of the research findings.

### *Experiential Learning*

The community/university collaboration has enabled 25 EXA students and alumni to acquire a richer understanding of community-relevant scholarship and civic awareness through experiential learning. The PTP decreased the traditional pedagogical separations between campus and community, and students were able to immerse themselves in the everyday functioning of a community center and learned from experiences on site (Allahwala et al., 2013). The process of

PTP also provided students an opportunity to gain skills in expressive arts therapy applications, leadership, peer mentorship, program development, and community-based research. A Second Study Year Student facilitator stated:

I remember the [lead investigator] did a training about the SEL stuff that was thorough and I thought that was really useful and [it] informed how I was with the kids then in the group. I guess for me it's hard to separate what was the training for the Glide project and what we were doing in the expressive arts therapy program.

The pre-practicum experience at FYCC also prepared students for practicum placement in the third year of their academic study. The pre-practicum field experience helped students gain valuable insight into what it means to be effective arts-based group facilitators and proficient in assessment and progress reporting. Practicum placement provided graduate-level students counseling experiences with children, adolescents, individuals, families, or couples. Various clinical sites allowed the student to advance professionally by applying knowledge and skills that follow the California's state licensure program. Hours accumulated during the pre-practicum placement are applied to the practicum experience. Another Second Study Year facilitator noted:

I was attracted to working at Glide because I wanted to get an early start on the experience of practicum and see what it was all about. We started to apply what we've been learning in school because I'm just a hands-on learner. I wanted to really learn more about the community in San Francisco and really wanted to work with [the lead investigator] on this project.

### *Impact of Proximal Process on Participants*

Social and emotional learning was the central theme of the study. Research on programs focused on SEL shows that this approach can be powerful when grounded in theory and empirical evidence, and when adult stakeholders (parents, teachers, coaches, school counselors) in children's education are actively involved in promoting and modeling their own social and emotional competencies (Bracket et al., 2009). Each year of the research, the children in PTP evolved as leaders, critical thinkers, and expressive artists. Group activities were



designed with five core competencies associated with SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. The BERS-2 Strength Index takes into account all of the behaviors and emotions assessed on the BERS-2. A strength index 90–110 is within the average range for children. Strength Index equal to or greater than 111 is indicative of above-average strengths. Strength Indexes of 80–89 are below average and represent borderline scores. Significantly low scores are Strength Indexes lower than 70 may be indicative of poor self-concept, immature or negative feelings or perceptions of adults and peers (Table 1).

The EXA students and FYCC teachers established an educational partnership that impacted the positive development of the children, not only through the content of their instruction but also through the quality of their social interactions and relationships with the children. In the initial rollout year, the EXA facilitators were challenged in the areas of classroom management, and FYCC teachers’ roles were relegated to behavioral managers rather than co-facilitators. Over the years, extensive program training and team-building activities enabled the workshop facilitators to grow and develop as an effective collaborative ensemble. The process of integrating thinking, feeling, and behaving was a reciprocal learning process for facilitators as well as the children.

According to an FYCC teacher:

I think my experience before was pretty good. I didn’t call it social-emotional learning, we just called it behavior management because that’s what behavior is, emotions given voice.... So slowly I started to realize that addressing the emotions was the work that I spent most of my time doing whenever there [was] a conflict, whenever there was a feeling of sadness or feeling of even happiness that turned into chaos. You have to manage the happiness as well. And then George Lucas’ website at utopia came out five years ago and I started taking some concepts from [its] emotional vocabulary education. When you’re a teacher you want to be able to say this is what happiness looks like and then my work with CIIS has really brought in[to] focus a lot of these things that I was doing in silos so to speak, managing someone’s anger and giving them an expression to use and

**Table 1.** Behavior and Emotional Strength Index

		Pre-test Y1	Post-test Y3
Very Superior	>130	--	--
Superior	121-130	--	1
Above Average	111-120	--	3
Average	90-110	7	7
Below Average	80-89	5	2
Poor	70-79	2	1

giving them a vocabulary that they can express what they want to use and talk to them about their needs, and so the study helped me put it against a larger backdrop and call it social-emotional learning.

*Community/University Reflection*

Throughout the findings and the narrative assessment above, we have incorporated the insights and viewpoints of the community and university partnership in our effort to integrate a community service-learning component and long-term community partnership into the California Institute of Integral Study’s Expressive Arts Therapy master’s-level program. Together, we created an initiative that not only transformed the lives of the children and parents, but had a tremendous impact on helping graduate-level students critically reflect on their position as university representatives in the partnership (Allahwala et al., 2013). We would also like to offer the following interview comments in which FYCC’s department manager and long-term employee of Glide reflects upon his organization’s engagement in this partnership:

One of the things that we struggle with is how do we move beyond the programming for our children and families. We provide a lot of services in terms of tutoring and art, and we always thought that there was a key component missing—working therapeutically with families. And so when the relationship with CIIS came up, we thought what a great opportunity to blend what you do and what we do that would better serve the children. And as a result, we also found it was helpful for staff. So, that first retreat that we had was great in terms of working collaboratively to decide what we were going to do for the retreat, how we were going to be supportive of the staff and create opportunities for the staff to tell their stories, their own personal stories through art. We did the trees [Tree of

Life], a lot of movement, and a lot of dancing. And some of our staff are uncomfortable with that, but your team had the ability to make people feel comfortable, and by the end of the day everyone was really into it. And that was a great start for our relationship and it's gone forward since then.

The study has become an important part of our program, and not just for the kids, but for the staff. It's great having someone come into the program and provide a different perspective, different teaching style, and objective, because the kids see our staff every day and sometimes it becomes very routine. And so, to have someone different come in who has an agenda about art and making a difference through art and changing people's lives through art, brings an excitement to the classroom and also...for the teachers. So, it's been tremendous to have a different curriculum to offer the kids who participated in the program. And it's been wonderful; the times that I've walked in and seen the kind of celebration and joy that goes on in these groups is amazing. And the kids are really looking forward to it.

When first started, we were experimenting where to offer this program and tried to shift it around to different age groups, and we decided to stay with one age group and progress with them as they get older. And the new component is working with the parents, and I think that is a wonderful addition. We are a family resource center and we are charged with offering opportunities for our parents. Thank you, and your team, because you are an important part of our family, and we are really fortunate to have you be a part of that family.

## Conclusion

Research-based community/university partnerships require authentic, reciprocal, and culturally appropriate consideration. In this research project, an important aspect of this relationship was the level of respect and trust displayed by both parties (Eckerle et al., 2011). The Expressive Arts Therapy program has worked diligently over the past five years to provide a learning community committed to preparing students to work in a very diverse

world and view research as a way to improve health and reduce health inequities through involving the people who, in turn, take actions to improve their own health. For universities, this involves self-reflective work and a process of assessment and preparation prior to embarking on a collaborative community service-learning journey with community partners. The conceptual and cultural differences between ourselves and the FYCC teachers with whom we were working regarding expressive arts and psychosocial development complicated the collaborative facilitation during the first year of the study. In retrospect, it seems that a thorough understanding of the after-school FYCC culture was not adequately incorporated into the training and that EXA processes dominated. A greater aspect of synthesis is strongly recommended for future workshops. Also, there is no way to correlate the growth directly to the arts-based intervention and children's social and emotional development. Further studies aiming to determine the effectiveness of SEL and expressive arts should be planned with randomized controlled study including follow-up periods.

Despite these limitations, several positive effects of the Playful Thursday intervention were observed among the students and teachers who were trained in the expressive arts therapy model, as well as among children who participated in the workshops. The after-school teachers developed a new set of SEL teaching perspectives and techniques, and the children produced innovative creative expressions of psychosocial, cultural, and empathic themes. The children came to anticipate each session with enthusiasm. They readily engaged in different activities and expressed, through storytelling, short film, and visual arts, many salient issues they were experiencing in their lives.

The community/university partnership will continue to provide SEL programming beyond the study with an evidence-based approach informed by the previous PTP project and the lessons learned along the way. Representatives from the EXA program and a teacher from FYCC presented the research findings at the 2015 International Expressive Arts Therapy Conference in Hong Kong. The presentation included our perspectives on university readiness, the potential of social justice initiatives, and the value and benefits of equitable partnerships, and the role of students in fostering and building a community-centric model.

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