Collaboration and Advocacy: A Community-University Partnership and the Well-being of Children

Alycia Elfreich
Indiana University—Indianapolis

Robert Helfenbein
Loyola University—Maryland

ABSTRACT

This paper examines a case study of a community-university collaboration in a Midwestern suburban community. In an effort to promote the well-being of students, a collaborative youth initiative partnership was created alongside a local university, public schools, and other community organizations. We reflect upon this collaboration and the need for a holistic approach to child development through community partnerships. We also address embedded tensions that call for a more transparent approach to challenges of cross-cultural work.

Keywords: child well-being, community-university collaborative partnerships, qualitative case study

INTRODUCTION

University-community partnerships offer both challenges and opportunities in which to engage in research and education projects. Oftentimes, power imbalances interfere with inequitable outcomes of collaborative research, which is frequently demonstrated through theoretical and formalized modes of knowledge recognized by universities that consequently silence the lived experiences and voices of the community (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004). Furthermore, power struggles also manifest through diverging cultures, norms, and expectations that often arise as a result of "negative consequences like hurt feelings, jeopardized outcomes, or wariness about future partnerships" (Dumlao & Janke, 2012, p. 152). Unfortunately, it is a quite common reality that community-university partnerships are inherently sources of conflict and tension (Prins, 2005). Sometimes, university faculty may see themselves as experts that offer knowledge to the community and may not see community partners as peers, but rather see themselves as "separate" from the communities in which they are collaborating (Dumlao & Janke, 2012; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). On the other hand, community members may also perceive themselves distinct from the university campus and community partners and leaders are often on shorter timetables and want the results of the partnerships to directly enhance the communities themselves (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

We realize there is a wide array of research surrounding community-university collaborative partnerships. Consequently, it is not our intent to reiterate the work surrounding these collaborations, but instead to offer a nuanced perspective of a holistic approach to mental health and well-being that is often neglected in our public schools, thus never reaching full development across home, school, and community environments (Awartani, Whitman, & Gordon, 2008; Coleman, 2009; Puolakka, Haapasalo-Pesu, Konu, Astedt-Kurki, & Paavilainen, 2014; UNICEF, 2007). We draw upon our person-

al experiences situated within this study that embrace the contradictions, tensions, and complex circumstances in order to engage in relational dialogue across K-12 schools, communities, and universities. True collaboration creates a space in which we grapple with feelings of discomfort and tension with each other (and with ourselves) that open possibilities for communication that address inequitable relationships between the institutions and the individuals involved in this project.

In alignment with the literature surrounding well-being, the first goal of this initiative was gaining an understanding of what well-being means to the community. This personal definition is particularly important as it provides a common ground in which to discuss the social and emotional aspects of children's and families' experiences and the impact it has on holistic approach to learning. This working definition also frames the larger discussion around relationships and many of the underlying tensions, struggles, and collaborative breakthroughs, as it provides a reference point in which all involved enter the conversation. As such, this community describes their understanding of well-being (via focus groups outlined in the methodology section of this paper) as mental, physical, and emotional health. Specifically, this includes a sense of safety and security; the balance of body, mind, and spirit; compassion; caring; support; resiliency; and finally, social and academic development.

We also fully acknowledge that relationships are hard, and although all involved are strongly committed to the children in the community, our intent is not to offer an idealized perspective of a community-university partnership. On the contrary, we provide our successes and failures in an effort to be transparent in our roles that problematize underlying issues of power and privilege between community members, families, and the university. As such, we offer a unique framework by exemplifying a case study of the well-being of children in a small, suburban community in collaboration with a large, urban university in the capital city of a Midwestern state. Finally, we situate our work within the voices of the community and advocate from a transformational model that is designed for empowerment, change, and community-building (Tibbitts, 2002), but does not shy away from the contradiction and conflict that are an innate part of human relationships.

Translational Research, Community-Based Work, and Power in Implementation

Gershon (2009) intends nothing short of troubling the role of university researchers in the communities in which they work and serve as a beginning point for reflecting on our project and how we want to think about culturally responsive evaluation and assessment. Simultaneously, we hope to challenge researchers in schools of education with the task of redefining conceptions, rethinking relationships, and reworking practices of contemporary research. Thus, Smith and Helfenbein (2009) question time-honored assumptions about what constitutes research and follows with a brief review of an alternative approach: Translating Research in Practice (TRIP). Central to this effort is a set of core commitments around which our work revolves from beginning to end: *the commitment to learning, the commitment to people, the commitment to teaching, and the commitment to work.* However, in the spirit of foregrounding unfinished relationship work, we've chosen to present here a continuing conversation on our joint project of translational research in education; in other words, *we're still thinking together about how we work together.*

Translating Research—Research in Relation

The goal of translational research is "to create ways in which to implement new systems, procedures, or routines predicated on research findings that are geared toward developing functional practices to improve our lives" (Petronio, 2007, p. 215). In taking

up translational research, our approach embodies a trans-disciplinary, collaborative model with the hope of having real impact in the lives of those who participate in the work. Focusing on challenges identified by the communities with which we partner, the intent lies in the possibility of bringing skills, expertise, and perspective from the university into dialogue with those closest to those challenges. To do so is time-consuming and ultimately dependent on the ongoing relationships built and fostered. Our goal in this paper is to speak to some of the trouble with relationships that perhaps, with all good intention, individuals committed to educational research that positively impacts those involved might just gloss over. As human beings, we understand that relationships are hard, people get let down in relationships, people leave relationships and, of course, people get hurt in relationships. In other words, very real and personal issues are at stake in a relationship-based approach to research, and to ignore those troubles would be to advance an approach less than honestly.

The project of translational research points to some of the complexities of truly working toward collaboration with a broad and diverse community. These tensions sometimes revolve around working with individuals with which we know we profoundly disagree, and the recognition that while we may think our work might be doing one thing, it may in fact be doing something quite different. And yet, we carry on in the hope that these challenges are not insurmountable and that some positive impact is possible. So then, to insist on working through the ways in which we are implicated in the research relationships we pursue leads us to the language of ethics—not just the "did we get it right" (Stake, 1995)—a mantra of sorts in the analysis phase of qualitative research methods—but "did we do right? Did we do right by these children? These parents? These educators?" This points us to the compelling phrase, "uncomfortable spaces" as those spaces in which we interrogate our ethical commitments are often uncomfortable and, it should be noted, *we may not like what we see*.

This necessary acknowledgement of the lack of guarantee in social interaction sparks a possible critique of the term "translational research." It would seem that the term "translational" still potentially re-inscribes power relations we say we want to move against (i.e., there is still a translator who decides on the construction of the text, there are *good* translations and *bad* translations), and it still seems to imply that we, the academy, give it to the community. This is not to say that those power relations can ever totally be overcome or that they won't emerge in some new, unanticipated way, or even that they sometimes shouldn't. Rather, it may be more useful to use the original term in describing the work of our multicultural center by Jose Rosario (1999), as "catalytic research." The idea being that the community and the academy come together around some core idea, participate in a dialogic process that establishes both what might be possible and the compromises we are *not* willing to make, and then takes up the project of making something happen—it's a catalyst. In this term we find at least the possibility of academic research, what can be called "a space of possibility" (Helfenbein, 2010), in our effort to positively impact the communities in which we work. It would seem that this is precisely the project of our partnership with this community.

The Well-Being Initiative

History and Demographics

The growth and development of this Midwestern community is the impetus to this initiative. The city is located 10 miles north of the capital and is currently experiencing rapid growth (both geographically and economically), and is situated in one of the fastest growing regions in the nation.[1] According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), the majority of residents are White (90.9%), 2% are African American, and 5.8% are Hispanic or Latino. During the

2013-2014 school year, 14% of students attending public schools in this area received free and reduced lunch, and 98.4% of students graduated compared to the state average of 88.6% receiving high school diplomas. As numbers of student enrollment may be a little more current compared to 2010 census data, 82.8% of students enrolled in the public schools are White, 7.5% of students are Hispanic and/or Latino, 2.6% are Black, 4.4% are identify as Multiracial, and 2.6% of students are Asian. This may be more indicative of the changing landscape of this community as different ethnic and racial groups of people are relocating due to the increase of job opportunities via geographical, infrastructural, and economic growth of the community.

Initiative Partners

In 2014, a local community youth organization and a public elementary school joined a university center for multicultural education to design and implement a research and development program that promotes the healthy development, well-being, and responsible citizenship of children and youth. This particular university multicultural center creates connections between research, theory, and practice with the aim of improving the quality of education throughout the P-20 continuum, and specifically focuses on the urban school setting. The center's work seeks to support inquiry, facilitate public discussion, create sustainable partnership with schools and other educational organizations, and critically and constructively challenge stereotypes about students' diversity, families, schools, and education.

In early 2009, the mayor of the city and Superior Court Judge decided to create a youth program to keep kids out of the juvenile court system. This program focuses on *preventative* treatment for youth rather than using disciplinary measures and adjudication. The program's goal is to identify youth in need of assistance prior to becoming part of the growing juvenile and criminal justice system.[2] Thus, the program assists youth 3 to 17 years of age. Services primarily consist of mentoring programs, community volunteer involvement, family education, family counseling, skill building tutoring programs, and scholarship camps.

The public school system in this community, which includes six elementary schools, an intermediate school, a middle school, and a high school, became involved in the initiative through the vision of an elementary principal. He worked closely with the youth assistance program and also involved other organizations in the community, including two Christian churches, the mental health agency that services the community, an after-school, extra-curricular, not-for-profit organization, and educators and administrators from other public schools.

Finally, these organizations, the multicultural center, and all community partners saw the need to integrate schools in order to further the development of their programs to meet the differing needs of the families within the community. This was achieved through a detailed needs-assessment of their community as it relates to child well-being, as well as the implementation of a research and development plan that includes targeted capacity-building processes and training to support communication and collaboration. Within this project and the changing nature of this community, an integral part of our work included the implementation of translational research that recognized the power structures that exist as a part of the research process, the community members who were involved in the project, and the impact it had on community members who did not participate in the initiative.

METHODOLOGY

This project used a case study approach (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009) that identified factors relating to the promotion

[1]The source is being withheld for confidentiality purposes.

[2]The source is being withheld for confidentiality purposes.

of child-rights and well-being of students. Qualitative methods of data collection included interviews and focus groups consisting of local educators, youth initiative members, parents, local pastors, and mental health professionals. Participants of the teacher focus group were voluntary members of a school book club that focused on social-emotional learning within the classroom setting. Parents who participated in the parent focus group were asked by the elementary school principal and are considered active in the school or involved in PTA. All other participants were emailed or called by phone because: 1) they were involved in the public school system or worked for or with the youth assistance program; 2) they were recommended to contact by school educators, administrators, and the youth assistance program; or 3) they were blindly called by the elementary school principal to participate.

Over the course of approximately three months, researchers conducted a total of nine focus groups (n=50), including teachers, local churches, educators, and community partners. The first round of focus groups (n= 34) targeted unique perspectives surrounding the following topics: 1) what well-being means to the community; 2) key issues when addressing well-being; 3) the most positive assets of the community; 4) the biggest challenges in supporting a sense of well-being for children; and 5) other services needed in the community. The second series of focus groups (n=16) were asked semi-structured questions that were constructed to dig a little deeper into conversations from the first round of focus groups. They included: 1) a general understanding of well-being in the community; 2) a clearer sense of what community means and how groups communicate across organizations and schools; 3) the impact of the demographic growth of the community and on the schools; and 4) the most effective way to provide resources to families in need.

Our roles as researchers developed out of a prior relationship through the multicultural education center in which we work. One author had developed a relationship with one of the partners and the second researcher was included in this project because of her research and interest in child and adolescent well-being. As it was just the two of us conducting the focus groups, we also relied upon our colleagues at the center to review our data, interpretation, and analysis for anything we may have overlooked in regard to power structures within the research process. Members of the research team began by reviewing observation notes. The data points were coded, themed, and entered into Nvivo for transcript analysis. Researchers applied codes representing the "conceptual labels" of each paragraph or data cluster (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The team then met with initiative participants and conducted member checks on the overall data and conclusions (Creswell, 2007). As the researchers and community members discussed the initial findings, more codes were added and conceptual labels were created that integrated the perspective of the community members alongside university researchers. We also invited other university partners (who also lived in the community) to our member-check meetings to create even more nuanced perspectives into the university-school-community partnership, as they had vested interests in all three facets of the initiative. We then presented the revised comprehensive report at a town hall meeting held once a month at a community organization and once at a local elementary school. The superintendent of the school district also reviewed the report and verbally gave his approval at the town hall meeting.

As part of our methodological approach that encourages and promotes conversation among partners in this study, we draw upon a framework for collaborative inquiry we adopted for this project specifically revolving around terms of commitment. Borrowing from George Noblit (1999) and his reflection on ethnographic study, we name four core commitments that exemplify translational research in education: (a) the commitment to learning, (b) the commitment to people, (c) the commitment to teaching, and (d) the commitment to work.

We remind ourselves that as we embark on new research projects, our first commitment is to learn. The way in which educational inquiry is taken up is rooted in the pursuit of deep understanding—understanding in the communicative, dialogic sense, in the sense of more listening than talking, at least in the beginning of projects. Commitments to people and social advocacy are tied together, driving both the *why* of taking up a research and evaluation project and the *who* of the decisions to collaborate. Finally, there is the explicit commitment to work itself, or rather, a commitment to work *through*. As one can see, these commitments are all wrapped together, but this last one is prominent because it takes seriously all of the commitments. The process of working through becomes complex and rich, and necessitates a fluid and emergent approach to research—an approach based in relationships.

Thus, we do not rely upon "findings" in traditional research and we resist the temptation to impose meaning on the process itself and choose to draw upon the situated experiences of all involved. Instead, we provide discussion points that promote conversation that allows us to keep talking, keep listening, and keep learning from one another. Indeed, their words are loving and thoughtful, and at the same time are conflicting and contradictory. They are equally open and vulnerable, while feeling closed off and isolated. But herein lies their "spaces of possibility" (Helfenbein, 2010). As researchers, it is not our intent or our right to close off conversations and reduce them to hard and fast conclusions. On the contrary, we choose to acknowledge the fluidity in the research process and the conceptualizations of the community in a dialogic, translational commitment to work together.

Discussion Points

Discussion points are presented here to illustrate both the collaborative efforts and the tensions surrounding the conversations throughout the focus groups. In particular, the themes that emerged from the focus groups highlight the framework of translational research that first and foremost recognizes the power structures within this well-being initiative, but also opens "spaces of possibility" to create ways to "implement new systems, procedure, or routines predicated on research finding that develop functional practices to improve our lives" (Petronio, 2007, p. 215). Thus, all partnerships and community members had the opportunity to meet and discuss the themes and initial findings to make sure all perspectives were represented. Minor changes were made in an effort to be representative to all involved, however we (as university researchers) remained transparent in our position to challenge assumptions by community members in an effort to more fully engage in meeting the needs of all children and families in the community.

Four themes are presented here in which we (university researchers), the community, and the school (families, parents, and teachers/administrators) agreed upon challenges as well as opportunities for growth in a holistic approach to well-being. These themes include: 1) assets and challenges of the community; 2) collaboration and communication; 3) parent/family expectations among parents; 4) community access to schools and feelings of isolation. Within each theme, we offer both the tensions within the community and the initiative itself, and provide the potential in which further collaboration and dialogue will create generative spaces of growth.

Assets and Challenges of the Community

There is a great sense of pride from community members who participated in this study. Many of the assets that were frequently mentioned included schools, community collaborations, networking among organizations, the youth assistance program, city government, youth sports, and the law enforcement/judicial system. As in all communities, challenges were also expressed, such as the complexities of well-being implementation, living up to the perceived "standards" of the community, communication between organizations (i.e., silos), and meeting the needs of diverse families and

students. Here, in comments from one community member, it is evident the contradictory nature both supports and nurtures pride, but also implies a sort of pressure in living up to the standards of the community:

> Someone looking from the community at the schools, I'm amazed at all the things that get accomplished at the school along with the academics and building that community and building character. A big asset is all of the different groups that have been named. They are all working together. No one is in it for their own cause. They are in it together and I think that is a huge part of our community, the willingness to help.

Indeed, the community is very proud of their accomplishments as well the commitment to collaborate and work together for the good of everyone. However, another community member provides a different perspective in which a "high-performing community" has unintended consequences that often place implicit values on children in the community with which not all families are comfortable:

> I also think one of the challenges is a high performing community whether it is athletics, academics, all those kinds of things. How do you help and be ok with things not going well or how do you teach the kids to be ok when they are literally surrounded by success? How do you help families not put pressure on their kids to work at a certain level that maybe they are not able to do that? It's hard to teach kids and families that.

Finally, all focus groups also talked about growth in one of two ways: 1) they were excited for what is to come as the area continues to expand, and 2) participants were apprehensive in terms of what growth means to schools (actual size of school, and academic responsibilities). Participants also expressed concerns about losing the identity of the community. As growth, diversity, and changing socioeconomics enter a primarily affluent community, the focus group participants were very proud of the values, cohesiveness, and success of this city. However, recognizing the values of different cultures instead of holding on to White, middle-class perspectives that do not recognize and meet the needs of changing demographics will be essential in creating possibilities of well-being for all children in the community.

Collaboration and Communication

In one form or another, all focus groups expressed the need and desire for collaboration. Although there have been hindrances in collaborative efforts in the past, community members felt that this initiative is definitely the first step. Many participants articulated their hopes in future collaborative efforts because of the conversations that will occur as a result of the study. Interestingly enough, collaboration within the community was articulated as both an asset and challenge; however, much of the conversation focused upon challenges faced among particular organizations trying to work more closely with schools. In particular, one participant provided an example of challenges faced, as he felt the schools and the city do not work together under one unified mission, and thus do not have that connection with families:

> We don't have one unified mission. It certainly could be said that the two most important ones, the schools and the city, don't. I think if *[sic]* we need to make it more of an innovational thing between the schools and the city. That must be the main mission. I think more people will follow along.

Another community member voiced her concern that schools do not work with other organizations in terms of meeting a diverse range of needs for students and families, and may run the risk of "falling through the cracks."

> But one of the issues that we constantly run into is kids will always tell us everything…we're kind of a

> safe place so kids tell us a lot…we see kids a lot…that they're just falling through the cracks and…I don't think it's the fault of the school, I think that there's just not a program in place for them to identify what their true needs are.

Finally, a participant believes there is value in different facets of the community working together and making visible connections among organizations for families in the community. Here, he provides a space in which the conversation might move away from all of the challenges and hindrances in collaboration and move toward opening a dialogue that nurtures the inherent connections among all organizations.

> I think with all of the different facets of the community…if we're doing things in the school, or if we're doing things with the police department, or we're doing things through the community groups like churches and clubs that is *[sic]* helping people see the connection…the direct line that connects those things together as opposed to everybody just kind of doing their own thing.

Again, there is a clear consensus that this community has particular values that serve as both an asset and a hindrance. Although the members from the schools and the city claim to have a collaborative, unified front, more than one focus group participant from the community felt this was not an accurate depiction of the city/schools relationship. Furthermore, teachers are maintaining the middle class values of the children they worked with previously without understanding the needs of more diverse students and families entering the area. As students "fall through the cracks," they implicitly blame the parents and remove any responsibility of the school. However, the last participant creates potentiality in continuing *relationships* across churches, organizations, schools, etc. When there are connections made throughout the community, well-being may be achieved.

Parent/Family Expectations Among Teachers and Parents

When the conversation first began with the parent focus groups, there was a unified front in the commitment of the parents and their roles within both the schools and communities. They also expressed this sentiment for parents throughout the community, not just the parents participating in the focus groups. However, these blanket statements quickly wore away as the conversation continued. In fact, both teachers and (active) parents expressed that many parents were not meeting the perceived expectations of the school, and that many times these parents solely relied on schools for everything (i.e., academics, emotional support, basic child-rearing responsibilities). In this regard, there were contradictions that arose in terms of well-being and its role in schools. For example, this teacher expresses an underlying concern that parents are not, and may not, have the skills to instill some of the same values that are expected within the classroom and in the school environment:

> The school [is] sometimes a child's only chance or last chance to get some of the parenting skills that used to be taught in the home but they are not. They don't exist in the home. So where are they going to get the skills to be socially appropriate? To have a sense of right and wrong? To learn a sense of respect for each other? To learn skills that they are going to need when they are in the workplace? To not only get a job but to keep a job? Not only to have a family but to keep a family? To own those things that we want our kids to? Sometimes the parents just don't have those skills.

Expectations in maintaining a specific identity are reiterated across focus groups.

A cohesive pride exists in the community with a collaborative desire to meet the needs of families in the community. However, diversifying cultures and value sets across families may not be fully represented as a result of the rapid growth of the community. Indeed, the values the community would like to promote and are represented in many of the focus groups may not be accessible to every resident equally. Although they expressed the desire for this well-being initiative to address some of these perceived obstacles with other families, there was not a cohesive feeling of community, but more divisive language was used, such as "lacking particular skills (parenting and otherwise)," "not taking responsibility," "expecting handouts," "little involvement in the community," etc. For instance, a teacher expressed the difference in expectations between some of the students and her perception of the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

> The majority of our children were saying things like I want to work at a gas station, I want to work at Wal-Mart, and they weren't thinking beyond…not dreaming and not thinking big and not realizing the potential that they had and where they could go. They were going just within their own small world.

This particular teacher touches upon some of the values and cultural understandings in the home compared to what is being taught in the classroom. There is an assumption that kids have not been "talked with" at home and that parents are not doing their jobs of parenting, and further, "just don't care."

> All of the experiences that you talk to them in between the car and going into a store . . . are we so busy? Or are we lacking the skills? Or is it even important? Or are we just too tired? Or whatever the situation is… it's that the kids have not been talked with. We [teachers] realize there are parents who are just flat out not doing it. They just don't care, that's just not a priority. A huge amount of parents I think just don't know how...

Among both teachers and parents, there is a clear division of families who have lived and worked in the community for a significant amount of time compared to families who have moved to the area within the past few years. As these parents and teachers struggle to maintain their middle class values surrounding education, parenting, and economic success, they perceive families coming from lower socioeconomic status and different ethnic and cultural values as deficit and not "doing their part" in participating in the overall care for children in the community. Nonetheless, having these conversations that are often uncomfortable for many prominent people in the community still acknowledges the power in translational research. In no way is this work easy or finished, or even scratches the surface of the effects of dominant values on marginalized groups; however, recognizing power relations that influence the impact of this initiative and beyond creates opportunities to begin *thinking together about how we work together.*

Community Access to Schools and Feelings of Isolation

Every focus group expressed the desire to find a cohesive way in providing services across schools and organizations. All community organizations discussed feeling "shut out" from schools in terms of physically not being allowed in schools, or a "disconnect" in how information is shared (or is not being shared) between organizations and schools. All groups felt that schools had the best access and insight to children and families, and they want to be supportive within the schools themselves.

Although community members expressed their best intentions of a cohesive community as the area continues to grow, conversations also addressed literal segregation into different neighborhoods, across

highway lines, and even into separate racial and ethnic enclaves. This also occurs within community organizations, as there are certain unintentional circumstances that separate collaboration and communication (mental health, religion in schools, involvement in extracurricular sports, etc.). Almost all focus groups talked about this in one way or another. This participant particularly discusses how the community is geographically separated and how it is necessary to have services reach all neighborhoods in the community and make sure resources support what families need:

> There's *[sic]* a couple of apartment complexes that are almost exclusively Hispanic and so what we've done is said well, okay, that's where you all live. I think one of the things that we need to do is then say okay if they are living there, then what are we going to do to reach into that group and what are we going to provide community service around them so that it doesn't become segregated? I think that's one of the things that we have to address

Demographically, the community is changing and new ethnic and racial groups are moving into the area. As a result, one participant acknowledges that there is a majority group in the community and anyone else may very literally be geographically and socially segregated.

> There's a group that seems to have the in, and then I would say if you are part of an ethnic group that isn't the majority, you probably aren't fitting in. One of the things I talked to the mayor a couple of times about was how we've almost created…[a] kind of ghetto…

Another participant expressed her feelings of segregation of mental health services from schools. As a result, students, families, and teachers do not have access to services that could be very beneficial for all.

> I have a lot of experience in the school settings providing mental health services and no matter what district I'm in, there just is a lack of services. There's so much need and not enough service provision. Our families just don't know how to access services or teachers don't know how to access services.

This participant suggests the need for connections among and between the community and schools in order to fully meet the needs of the community:

> We have a student that's bulimic, who was suicidal, she was cutting, but mom doesn't want the school to know because they're an upstanding family in the community. If the school knows then people that know her family know…but if we just don't have that connection…the school doesn't even know what's going on because there's all of this hidden stuff and we're not equipped.

It is precisely these tensions and contradictions that exist within a community that perceives itself as both cohesive and unified. At the same time, community members acknowledge segregation and stratification. Therefore, translational research lends itself to committing and working through personal ethical and moral commitments. Indeed, translational research challenges complicity in power and marginalization, and acknowledges the tensions and contradictions of maintaining traditional values in a primarily White, affluent community. However, as researchers, the opportunities for generative conversations that influence change are infinite because community partners came to us in recognition of the need to address these issues and nurture the well-being of the entire community's children. Thus, we move into an alternative approach to current research that embraces the uncomfortable, conflicting, contradictory dialogue in order to move toward "catalytic research" (Rosario, St. John, Murthadha-

Watts, & Medina, 1999) of what is yet to come.

Moving Forward: Catalytic Change and Lessons Learned (and Still Learning)

At the end of the first stage of this collaborative research project, we end with a mutual commitment to learning, people, teaching, and work. As we acknowledge the power imbalances that interfere with equitable outcomes of collaborative research, we have drawn upon the expertise of the community as opposed to university researchers. In this initiative, our intent is to be transparent in our approach to cross-cultural work, which challenges privileged perspectives around issues of power and marginalization of underrepresented groups in the community and having these difficult conversations with initiative partners. Cross-cultural work indicates the need for further collaboration with members of the community who did not participate in the first stage of this initiative and who may offer more diverse perspectives. Furthermore, it is important for schools to address how particular policies segregate and isolate community organizations that could support the well-being of children (e.g., mental health organizations and faith-based organizations are unable to work within the school setting).

Although we have disagreed and we have argued, we are still working *through* these power relations in an effort to keep the children of the community at the forefront of the initiative. For example, community members suggested monthly town halls to be implemented on Saturday mornings to continue the conversation around this initiative, but to change locations in an effort to recognize other organizations in the community. What remains to be seen is now that we have unearthed our ethical commitments, as educators, as parents, and as invested community members, what are we willing to compromise? As educational researchers, we know what we are not willing to compromise: 1) the need for future, equitable collaboration and transparency among all partners, parents, and educators that specifically address community members who are not represented in our initial focus groups and meetings; 2) cultural competency as integral for educators, students, families, and the well-being of the entire community; and 3) the development of an accessible, comprehensive, community-wide resource that advocates for and assists families in the community (particularly mental health services within the school, as currently none exist).

Finally, "catalytic research" serves us well as a descriptor of the research we've taken up in regard to child well-being in this community. Our initial intention began in providing a space for community activists, educators, and scholars to come to the table with us. We entered into dialogue, compromised and identified issues we would not compromise, and agreed to work toward understanding and developing ways in which to better meet the development and well-being of children. Of course what happens next is complicated, emergent, not guaranteed and, further, perhaps troubling—the questions is: Can we continue to move beyond those uncomfortable spaces into generative ones? Can we hold to our commitment to work with one another? Indeed, as we transition into the next phase of this work, we offer the words of a community member and educator who embodies the commitment that we, as community-based researchers need to work together, rethink, and reflect on our practices:

> I think you know our schools do a great job and I think this place is a nice place to raise a family. I think our challenge is how do we get a community that is primarily white and primarily affluent to care as a community about this? I think that is a struggle. We're pretty one tone in this community in that we are pretty well to do. We're in our own little world…I think that is a challenge to get your culture and your schools and your culture in your city to be geared towards you make[ing] sure that everybody else is doing ok too? We live in a great place. How, in a place where we have literally what-

ever we want, do we try to make sure that other people can get by?

REFERENCES

Awartani, M., Whitman, C. V., & Gordon, J. (2008). Developing instruments to capture young people's perceptions of how school as a learning environment affects their well-being. *European Journal of Education, 43*(1), 52-70.

Coleman, J. (2009). Well-being in schools: Empirical measure, or politician's dream? *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(3), 281-292.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*, 3-21.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dumlao, R. J., & Janke, E. M. (2012). Using relational dialectics to address differences in community-campus partnerships. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16*(2), 151-175.

Fisher, F., Fabricant, M., & Simmons, L. (2004). Understanding contemporary university-community connections. *Journal of Community Practice, 12*(3-4), 13-34.

Helfenbein, R. (2010). Thinking through scale: Critical geography and curriculum spaces. In E. Malewski (Ed.) *Curriculum studies handbook: The next moment* (pp. 304-317). New York: Routledge.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Noblit, G. W. (1999). *Particularities: Collected essays on ethnography and education.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Petronio, S. (2007). JACR commentaries on translating research into practice: Introduction. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 35*(3), 215-217.

Prins, E. (2005). Framing a conflict in a campus-community partnership. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 25*(1), 57-74.

Puolakka, K., Haapasalo-Pesu, K-M., Konu, A., Astedt-Kurki, P., & Paavilainen, E. (2014). Mental health promotion in a school community by using the results from the well-being profile: An action research project. *Health Promotion Practice, 15*(1), 44-54.

Rosario, J. R., St. John, E., Murthadha-Watts, K., & Medina, M. (1999). *Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME) white paper on mission, approach, organizations, and projects.* Indianapolis, IN.

Sandy, M., & Holland, B. A. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 13* (1), 30-43.

Smith, J. S., & Helfenbein Jr., R. J. (2009). Translational research in education: Collaboration and commitment in urban contexts. In W. S. Gershon (Ed.), *The collaborative turn: Working together in qualitative research* (pp. 89-104). Rotterdam, NL: Sense.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tibbitts, F. (2002). Understanding what we do: Emerging models for human rights education. *International Review of Education, 48*, 159-171.

U.S. Census Bureau (2009). Quick facts. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/1882700,18

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

AUTHOR NOTE

Dr. Alycia M. Elfreich is a visiting Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Indiana University--Indianapolis where she teaches teacher education and research methods courses, and is the Coordinator of Graduate School Profes-

sional Development. She is currently an Associate Editor for the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE). Dr. Elfreich's scholarship examines persistent trauma as a result of gendered and racialized experiences in schools and society, as well as feminist methodological approaches that speak to more equitable educational research practices. She is also interested in expanding conventional notions of qualitative research that encourages researchers to think differently and ethically about the research and in which they engage.

Rob Helfenbein is Associate Dean of the School of Education at Loyola University Maryland and has published numerous pieces about contemporary education theory in journals such as *Curriculum Inquiry*, the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, Educational Studies*, *The Urban Review*, and co-edited the books *Unsettling Beliefs: Teaching Theory to Teachers* (2008), *Ethics and International Curriculum Work: The Challenges of Culture and Context* (2012), and *Deterritorializing/Reterritorializing: Critical Geographies of Education Reform* (2017). He is currently serving as Editor of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* and current research interests include curriculum theorizing in urban contexts, cultural studies of education, and the impact of globalization on the lived experience of schools.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alycia Elfreich, Indiana University School of Education—IUPUI, 902 W. New York St. ES 3136B, Indianapolis, IN 46202-5155. Email: amcgowan@iupui.edu