School-Community Partnerships and Community-Based Education: A Case Study of a Novice Program

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the struggles and successes of teachers and students collaborating with community organizations on the Second Tuesday Project, a community-based research and service program at an urban high school. Using qualitative methods, the study includes data from interviews, participant-observations, and focus groups to describe the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers participating in the Second Tuesday Project. Findings from the study highlight challenges with communication and curricular planning as well as successes with logistics and program flexibility. Implications for educators include the importance of clearly articulated goals, purposes, and guiding theories shared with all participants and a creative approach to removing logistical barriers between schools and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Community-based education has been increasingly introduced to teachers and students as a way to enrich and expand classroom learning. Related to place-based, environmental, or place-conscious education, these approaches share the goal of making learning more relevant and meaningful to students by situating it in local and familiar issues, contexts, and challenges. Curriculum is deeply connected to the people, landscapes, cultures and politics students can know and experience locally.

In order to situate learning in authentic community contexts, schools rely on partnerships outside of the school to support the learning process. Longo (2007) explains,

> Education in the community is active learning that takes place outside of, but often connected with, the classroom. It involves more than a one-time community service project; it means intentionally putting education in the context of long-term community-building efforts. It is most often place-based, using a collaborative, integrated, problem-solving approach. (p. 10)

These collaborative, integrated, community projects often involve direct partnerships with local community organizations, agencies, or institutions.

Researchers argue that community-based education fosters students' civic participation (Gruenewald, 2003; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Theobald, 2006; Williams, 2003) and increases student motivation and engagement (Lewicki, 2000; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Smith, 2002; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Umphrey, 2007). Brooke (2003) explains,

> By centering education in local civic issues, history, biology, economics, literature, and so forth, learners will be guided to imagine the world as intradependent, filled with a variety of locally intradependent places, and to develop a richer sense of citizenship and civic action. (p. 6)

Keyes and Gregg (2001) argue that place- and community-based education has been shown to increase student attendance, graduation rates, parent participation, and community unity.

For educators interested in community-based practices, these outcomes serve as motivation and justification for their efforts. But community-based education is more than simply engaging students in community work outside the classroom. Hogan (2002) describes some of the challenges community-based classrooms encounter by comparing them to traditional classrooms. She argues that although traditional teaching methods allow teachers to create lessons appropriate to individual student abilities and learning levels,

> these project scenarios are often artificial simulations or offer limited contextual immersion, so they do not allow students to build identities as contributing members of a large community. In contrast, community-based and service learning programs offer the full richness of authentic contexts, yet present the difficult pedagogical challenge of tailoring experiences to maximize student involvement and growth. (p. 618)

Understanding the pedagogical challenges of community-based education is most useful for educators hoping to incorporate community-based pedagogies in their classroom.

This study is part of a larger research project using place and spatial theories to explore the connections between community-based education and students' sense of place. The purpose of this paper is to examine more closely the day-to-day experiences, successes, and pedagogical challenges of teachers and students working with community partners as part of the Second Tuesday Project (STP), an urban, community-based research project for students at Jefferson Center High School in Riverside.

In this study, I wanted to look more closely at how teachers grappled with the pedagogical challenges community-based education presents. Specifically, how do teachers and students create

and experience classroom curriculum to support community-school partnerships? What are the essential components of community-based education in the classroom that foster meaningful and relevant experiences and learning? What insight can the successes and challenges of a community-based education program like the STP offer educators interested in fostering similar community-based projects?

RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND METHODOLOGIES

Research Context

The city of Riverside is a large, Midwestern city of over 300,000 people. Jefferson Center High School is a public magnet school located in the heart of Riverside, directly across the street from the city's large, public university. Students at Jefferson Center come from all over the city, but a majority come from the low-income and urban neighborhoods surrounding Jefferson Center. 78% of Jefferson Center's 1300 students qualify for free and reduced-lunch. 92% of Jefferson Center's students are African-American, 4% are White. On standardized tests, Jefferson Center students perform as well or slightly better than their district peers; though the school is not considered one of Riverside's best schools, it is also not considered one of the worst.

Jefferson Center draws students interested in its five career-focused school-within-a-school programs. Each of the schools (the Math and Science Academy, Communications, Teaching and Technology, Human Services, and the Zoo Academy, co-taught with educators from the nearby Riverside Zoo) enrolls about 250 students. Each program consists of a Program Facilitator who teaches half-time and a small faculty of 8-10 teachers responsible for core courses (Math, Science, English, Social Studies) and program-specific courses (Communication, Sociology, Zoology). Students across programs share language, arts, music, and physical education classes. Each program is located in its own wing or floor of the school. Because students are enrolled in the same program throughout their four years at Jefferson Center, the programs have a distinct small-school feel; students' lockers are located in their program wing and hallways are filled with faculty and students who know each other well.

This study took place during the 2007-2008 school year, the second year of the Human Services Program. Formerly the "Paideia Program," faculty restructured the program around careers in the Human Services in order to receive additional vocational funding. Tom Spillings, the Human Services Program Facilitator, explained:

> In the last two years, with parents increasingly confused with what Paideia is... and knowing our clientele, knowing our students and their career interests, we found a good fit with Human Services. It was a career pathway they were just starting at the state level...it gave us the opportunity to bring in state money to supplement and augment what we do here in the program. We are facing budget shortfalls. Annually we have been cutting teachers so finding a natural fit with Human Services - which was also a state recognized vocational/career pathway - brought us additional state funding. (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

The capstone course in the Human Services Program is the 12th grade Human Services class co-taught by the program's 11th and 12th grade English and Social Studies teachers. The central focus of the course is students' community-based research project, the Second Tuesday Project (STP). The STP is a research and service project aimed at understanding Riverside's efforts to improve the quality of life for its citizens. Teachers describe the project in introductory materials as "a team-based, multi-disciplinary, senior level project that requires each student to research a specific social issue within the Riverside community (i.e. homelessness, hunger, poverty, pollution, etc.) and implement a plan to help resolve that issue" (Course overview handout, 9/7/07). Over the course of the year, students research a community issue through secondary sources (popular media, professional journals, reference books, and online databases) and through first-hand experiences volunteering at a community organization related to their issue. Students spend one day a month in the field working with an agency mentor who oversees their service. On-site, students volunteer in whatever capacity their mentors determine and are expected to conduct research interviews throughout the school year in support of their final research paper and presentation. The culmination of the project is a week-long symposium of students' research; students present their study to classmates, faculty, administrators, parents, and community agency representatives.

Research Methodology

Participants. The Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center was selected as the site of this study for a number of reasons. First, the lead teacher Jerry Michaels is an old friend and was enthusiastic about the inclusion of his students, faculty, and program in the study. English teacher Sandra Patterson was also enthusiastic about the project and more than willing to offer her classroom, time, and energy to support this research. Second, the STP is decidedly place- and community-based. Michaels describes the fundamental questions guiding the program as "How does the Riverside society help its members who are most at need? How do we provide a decent life to people in our community? How do we help people who are less fortunate?" (Michaels interview, 12/19/2007).

Michaels and Patterson are veteran teachers at Jefferson Center High School. They are both in their 50's, White, and middle class. Over the course of the 2007-2008 school year, I observed Michaels' and Patterson's classes, attended formal and informal faculty meetings, and conducted both structured and unstructured interviews with them.

Participating students included the Human Services' senior class of 38 students, eight of whom volunteered to attend four after-school focus group sessions and two individual interviews. Additionally, those students provided me with samples of class

work and their final research papers. Students ranged in age from 16-19 and all identified as African-American.

I am a former high school science and English teacher, White and middle-class. My experiences as a teacher, parent, and, most importantly, a former resident of Riverside (I attended public elementary and secondary schools in Riverside) helped me foster positive relationships with participants; teachers tolerated my presence as they would a pre-service teacher. Students regarded me similarly; I was an adult with little authoritative power but one who asked a lot of questions and offered a reasonably interesting after-school activity with ample free food.

Curriculum study. I was interested in the daily struggles and successes of teachers and students grappling with the challenges of community-based education in the classroom. I wanted to understand participants' experiences with the Second Tuesday Project and the way they made sense of their participation in or facilitation of the project. I was interested in processes, interactions, and dynamics that occur within a community-based classroom – how community-based education works – or "the nature of phenomena" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 18). Because of these guiding interests, qualitative research methodologies were most appropriate to this study; they emphasize the lived experiences of individuals and the meaning individuals make from these experiences (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

I relied upon participant observation methods to guide my study of the Human Services Course curriculum. For one or two weeks of each month of the 2007-2008 school year, I visited Jefferson Center High School, observed the 12th grade Human Services Course, attended Human Services faculty meetings, facilitated student focus group sessions, and interviewed students, faculty, and administrators about the program. I collected classroom materials including course descriptions and handouts, formal program communications with parents and community agencies, students' in-class assignments, and final research papers. I attended the students' research symposium at the end of the school year.

Interviews with faculty examined curricular goals and outcomes, experiences with the Second Tuesday Project, and reflections on community-based practice. Interviews with students explored their experiences with the STP and its influence on their learning, growth, and civic participation. I facilitated student focus group sessions primarily for broader research goals of understanding students' sense of place but discussions also examined students' collective STP experiences and participation.

In addition, I supported classroom curricular efforts by facilitating a two-day workshop with students on community-based research. The first day, I introduced my study and use of community-based research methods, drawing similarities between students' STP research methodologies and my own. The second day, I described the process of developing a research plan and began brainstorming and identifying research questions with students.

All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. I took field notes during classroom observations, interviews, and focus group sessions. Typical of qualitative research, my data analysis was ongoing and recursive (Merriam, 1998; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). I utilized the content analysis and constant comparison methods (Merriam, 1998) for making sense of multiple sources of data and identifying recurrent trends and ideas in order to thread together common themes illustrated in my findings.

Theoretical foundations. In this study, I was interested in the day-to-day experiences of students and teachers participating in a community-based research project. Important to my data collection, analysis, and interpretation was a sensitivity to the way participants described their experiences and developed an understanding about themselves, their school, and their community through the project. Social constructivism guided my understanding and interpretation of participants' experiences. Lincoln (2005) writes, "constructivism... attends to the meaning-making activities of active agents and cognizing human beings" (2005, p. 61). She explains that both physical and temporal data contribute to the process of meaning-making. Specifically, "meaning-making... engages two dimensions of individual social life: actual events and concrete situations, and the particular and individual mental stances which impute meaning to those events and situations" (Lincoln, 2005, p. 61). In this study, I was interested in the day-to-day physical events and concrete situations of students and teachers participating in the Second Tuesday Project. I was also interested in participants' interpretation of classroom and community activities – how they described, analyzed, internalized, or challenged those experiences.

FINDINGS

Careful study of the community-based Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center High School highlighted three dimensions of its curricular structure and practice central to the pedagogical successes, failures, and overall experiences of its participants: logistical flexibility, communication and planning, and curricular connectivity.

In this section, I will first summarize the 2007-2008 school year in the Human Services classroom by examining curricular activities and student/teacher classroom experiences. I will explore the day-to-day struggles and successes more specifically through an examination of the three key dimensions of the curriculum's structure and practice that were most challenging and rewarding for participants.

Course Overview

The school year began with Michaels introducing and describing the program to students. In introductory materials for faculty and students, Michaels wrote:

> The purpose of the STP is to help students discover how to develop successful interviewing skills, utilize advanced research technologies, create and implement solutions to community problems, construct a formal paper detailing their discoveries and experiences, and present their findings in a multi-media Power Point platform. Through the STP, students identi-

fied a Riverside community issue or problem and then found a community agency or organization related to that problem where they could volunteer and conduct field research throughout the year. The Human Services course supported students as they identified their issues, volunteered monthly at their agencies, researched the issues/problems, wrote a research paper, and presented their papers at a program-sponsored research symposium.

The Human Services class met daily for the first 45 minute class period of school. Most days, Patterson and Michaels met briefly before school started to discuss the day's plan and then split the 38 Human Resources seniors into two groups, working in their own classrooms with the groups. Classes were held jointly for introducing new assignments, for organizing research logistics, or when guest speakers were present.

One of the earliest and most memorable activities students cited from the course was the Graffiti Wall, a "last minute stroke of inspiration" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07) from Patterson who came up with the idea moments before class started the second week of school. She used the activity as a brainstorming and discussion tool to introduce community contexts, issues, and problems. She asked students to "graffiti" on a large roll of butcher paper problems or issues they identified in their communities. Students were enthusiastic, focused, and direct about the task; they quickly filled the poster with issues like drugs, pollution, violence, STDs, and prostitution. Throughout the week, students continued to add concerns to the wall and discuss the issues highlighted. Patterson considered the activity a success as it introduced the idea of community-based curriculum and initiated thought and discussion about students' concerns for their neighborhoods and communities.

After spending the first two weeks of school introducing the STP and filling the graffiti wall, introductory units on homelessness and domestic violence began. Students read local articles on the topics, wrote response papers, and discussed the issues with classmates. Guest speakers from Riverside's social service agencies visited the classroom to discuss local approaches to addressing these issues. During this time, students also identified their research issues and made initial contacts with related community organizations and agencies. In October, they spent their first Tuesday in the field.

Students' experiences at their STP field sites varied widely. Karen worked with a child development agency that conducted home visits with low-income families in order to improve parenting skills and school readiness. Briana researched the inner workings of the city's foster care system by volunteering at an agency that coordinated social workers and volunteer child advocates.

Adam was frustrated by the lack of organization at his agency, a job-support center for teens and young adults. Throughout the year, he described feeling "bored" at the agency where his "best day there ever" was when he was given fliers to post on a bulletin board (Fieldnotes, 2/20/08). Dana shared this sentiment, and although she enjoyed taking tours of the city with representatives from the Urban League documenting links between urban environments (pollution, property upkeep, road conditions) and crime, she described most of her Second Tuesdays as spent "spinning in my chair, reading brochures and watching my mentor work at her computer" (Fieldnotes, 2/20/08).

Other students worked "shucking boxes" (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08) – organizing donated school supplies to send to needy schools. Some volunteered at women's shelters and attended group therapy sessions on domestic violence. Kayla-Jean volunteered with the Riverside Black Theater Company and helped with event promotion, rehearsals, and office work. Additional agencies working with students included YMCA after-school youth programs, elementary schools, homeless shelters, nursing homes, and HIV/AIDS support organizations.

On the school days following their "second Tuesdays" in the field, students returned to Michaels' or Patterson's classrooms for group discussions about their experiences. These discussions served primarily as a reporting and sharing tool; Michaels and Patterson called on individual students asking them to describe their activities in the field.

A significant portion of class time, especially later in the school year, was spent in the Human Resources computer lab. Students were assigned to do online research, begin writing papers, or develop their presentation slides. Michaels and Patterson often used this time to catch up on grading and paperwork, and students were left to work independently. Responses to this freedom varied, as some students were highly directed and focused but many others were easily distracted by unsuccessful Google searches, disruptive classmates, Internet access, or other school work.

Occasionally, students and teachers welcomed guest speakers from local community social service agencies who discussed the goals of their agency/organization, broader community issues like poverty and crime, or careers in the social services. They also embarked in small and large groups on field trips to various agencies, organizations, and institutions as part of the research process. The final research symposium was the culmination of the STP and the Human Services program. Students' research and presentations varied as widely as their placements and will be discussed below.

Logistical Flexibility

Central to most community-based curricular projects is authentic engagement with community work outside of school walls. A strong advocate of breaking down traditional barriers between schools and communities, Human Services Program Facilitator Tom Spillings explained,

> Imagine a field trip that was a service opportunity that was repeated seven or eight times or maybe in the future weekly for maybe 30 weeks. The ties you build, the understanding you have of adult working relationships… that's what you want, that's what you want your high school to do, to be a partner with your community. That's what it should be. (Spillings interview 2/15/08)

With the support of administrators like Spillings, Michaels and Patter-

son were able to secure the flexibility of their program and freedom of their students in order to remove many traditional barriers to authentic community participation. Though their experiences in the community varied, STP teachers and students made use of a myriad of community resources: social and environmental agencies and organizations, the Riverside University, and the city's public transportation system.

Because of its location neighboring the Riverside University Library, the Jefferson Center administration had negotiated a partnership with the university granting all Jefferson Center students university ID cards which allow them to use the libraries and recreational facilities at the college. Patterson and Michaels took advantage of this agreement and arranged for a formal tour and research workshop at the library and permitted students to spend class time there if arranged in advance. Students valued this open access to the university and made efforts to study there during and after school. Briana explained,

> When you go over there, especially if you go to the student union, there is an area with lots of tables and college students just sitting around. We go over there in groups and we take our books and our homework and upstairs there are chairs where we sit and do our work. People walk past, especially people who used to go to school here at Jefferson Center and they say, "Oh, look at these seniors from Jefferson Center, look at them sitting over here working, being smart. This is cool that you all are sitting over here doing your work. What are you working on?" It makes me feel really smart, really smart – I love it…When we go to the university, if we take our ID cards, we get to eat at their buffet cafeteria, we get to go to their recreation center. We get to use the library, they are just open. And we get to have fun over there – especially in the library because you know everyone is there for the same purpose, and you just sit there typing, thinking "I'm just as smart as they are!" Just sitting there typing, writing my paper. It is cool. (Briana interview, 5/8/08)

Throughout the year, students were also permitted to arrange meetings with community members outside their second Tuesdays to help in their research. Once, Michaels helped three students struggling to understand the welfare system meet with a representative of the Department of Health and Human Services downtown during school hours. Michaels simply cleared the students' schedules with other Human Services faculty, let students check the public bus schedule (all Riverside Public School students use their school ID for free or reduced bus fares on the city's system), and sent them on their way.

An important factor facilitating this level of flexibility was the small school-within-a-school structure of Jefferson Center High School. Because the entire Human Services Faculty team was located on one floor in one wing of the school building and teachers knew all STP students and their schedules, it was very easy for Patterson and Michaels to change bell schedules, correct attendance, and accommodate students who were out of the building as part of their Second Tuesday Project. Michaels and Patterson could very easily modify students' academic schedules by conferring with other core Human Services facility located just down the hallway or around the corner.

Parents and school administrators were supportive of this flexibility; after initial permission slips and explanatory handouts, students did not have to complete additional paperwork in order to leave campus. Michaels and Patterson entrusted their students with a great deal of responsibility to navigate the city bus system, find their way around town, and show up where and when they were supposed to. Although faculty checked on students by maintaining communications with agency representatives, the responsibility of attendance and participation was completely on the students' shoulders.

Students in the Human Resources Course studied community issues in the classroom with guest speakers and through curricular units on homelessness and domestic violence. But students also physically left school to work with organizations directly involved with the Riverside community. The logistical flexibility of the Human Resources Program facilitated expansive community partnerships and learning opportunities for students. The program allowed students to easily leave Jefferson Center campus to work at the Riverside University library and meet with field mentors or other community representatives. Students like Briana valued those experiences as they helped students feel connected to the broader community, as was evidenced by her statement that "everyone is there for the same purpose… I'm just as smart as they are!" (Briana interview 5/8/08). All of these outside experiences occurred during the school day, providing students with authentic experiences of work and service in the community.

Communication and Planning

Beyond a very basic division of labor (Michaels facilitated field placements and community partnerships, and Patterson supported the research paper planning and writing), there was very little curricular planning between the two lead teachers. When I asked teachers about their Human Services curriculum before the school year started, Patterson's response was a definitive "We don't have a curriculum" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07). Michaels described his curricular planning as "flying by the seat of my pants" (Fieldnotes, 9/7/07). However, because he had directed similar service and community-study programs before, he was comfortable facilitating the Second Tuesday Project, helping students identify placements and make connections with community agencies, mentors and volunteers.

Michaels and Patterson organized the course around a timeline of student assignments and deadlines, including identifying a research topic and securing a volunteer placement. Initial units on domestic violence and homelessness included a mix of articles, guest speakers, discussions, and response papers. Once students had begun working in the field, there were very few coordinated efforts to plan curriculum, address project goals, assess student progress, or refine course direction. Teachers moved through the

school year with a limited curricular plan focused on field work, research, writing, and presentation deadlines.

Most communication between Michaels and Patterson regarding the Human Services course happened informally before school as they quickly discussed the day's or week's plan. As the year progressed and deadlines for papers and presentations loomed, planning and communication between Michaels and Patterson nearly disappeared. With many pressing end-of-year obligations related to their other courses and responsibilities, the STP became a footnote and their rare planning discussions focused on "How do we occupy students during the Human Services bell period?" (Fieldnotes, 4/2/08). Increasingly, students were given undirected free time to work at computers on their research, writing, and final presentations.

When they reflected on the school year in the Human Services classroom, the teachers felt that one of their key problems was a lack of communication, planning, and a clear sense of purpose. Patterson explains,

> If we are able to do the STP next year, then I think Michaels and I will have a clearer focus of what we need to establish, what we need to accomplish, what things we can discuss, keeping in mind the different agencies and topics the kids are interested in… if we have these ideas from the beginning, we'll know where we are going… This year we didn't develop a language because we really didn't know quite where we were going. I know how I want my research paper to look at the end but what Michaels thought was different, that bred confusion. I think it would be better next year. This year has just been "OK, let's try it – let's see!" (Patterson interview, 2/13/08).

Patterson went on to explain that there was no "common language" to use discussing the course and program, "It wasn't like there was a vision guiding everybody and we were all on the same page…" As a result, Michaels and Patterson often had very different ideas about what needed to happen in the classroom. As a 12th grade English teacher, Patterson prioritized the students' STP research paper because it would be a cornerstone piece in their writing portfolio, a district graduation requirement. Michaels, responsible for students' attendance, participation, and relationship with community partners, prioritized positive field experiences. Where Patterson often pushed for class time dedicated to writing and research, Michaels was more interested in facilitating additional student work in the community: small and large group field trips, additional service projects, and more guest speakers.

Students noted this lack of curricular organization and direction. Dana commented – to her peers' agreement - "Things were just thrown at us out of nowhere at the last minute" (Fieldnotes, 5/7/08). Human Services Program Facilitator Spillings observed,

> [The Human Service faculty] need to spend a day or two together, sharing our vision. We need to come to some agreement of what it is we want to do and how it is we want to do it…I think the primary thing we need to make this work is time and the facilitation to come up with the "how does this work, how do these pieces come together?" (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

A lack of communication and planning was due in part to the instability of academic schedules at Jefferson Center. Neither Michaels nor Patterson knew their teaching schedules until the beginning of the school year. Because the Human Services Program was only in its second year, overall program and course goals had not been fully developed. Unclear communication and insufficient planning was observed by all participants in the STP classroom. As a result, participants were frustrated with curricular organization and experienced many unproductive and undirected days in the classroom.

Curricular Connectivity

Although the curricular plan and communication were unclear, it was evident in scheduling that field experiences and academic research were important aspects of the Human Services course. But as I will describe in this section, students had difficulty making connections between their personal experiences in the field and their research into community issues. Discussions in the classroom after field days did not challenge students to interpret or contextualize their experiences. In their final research papers and presentations, many students struggled to make meaningful connections between their field work, research, and chosen community issues.

Following students' service and research days in the field, Michaels and Patterson split seniors into two groups to discuss their field experiences. Discussions were limited to the 45-minute class period and were structured more as "round-robin" reports then actual discussions. Teachers and students offered very little in terms of follow-up questions to encourage careful reflection or analysis of field activities. In a typical exchange below documented in my fieldnotes (1/10/08), Chuck lamented his work at a local soup kitchen and described the exhaustion of "being on my feet all day" restocking freezers, moving crates, and doing dishes for the hungry people who came in for a free meal. Complaining about the physical labor, Chuck explained that he "only ever sat down to eat lunch."

"So what have you learned about hunger?" Michaels asked.

Chuck waited a moment before responding dryly, "…that everyone likes to eat."

The class erupted with laughter and Michaels called on the next student (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08).

Questions like Michaels' above, challenging students to contextualize their experiences in broader issues and struggles were rare. When they did occur, the questions were often sidestepped by students the way that Chuck did here, and teachers acquiesced due to time constraints.

On another occasion, students Carrie and Lynette described their experiences working at an HIV/AIDS support agency and were surprised to learn that the agency helped clients pay rent, health care, and grocery bills. Carrie and Lynette interviewed some clients

and were intrigued by and intent on sharing with the class details of clients' sexual narratives (which clients freely shared with students). The class was surprised and shocked about the financial support clients received from the agency, launching into an uproarious discussion about whether one should "choose to be gay" and HIV positive so that social service agencies could pay one's bills. Michaels attempted to sort out students' misconceptions about choice, homosexuality, and HIV, declaring, "Homosexuality is not a choice! Don't you remember anything from Psychology? Studies show that one's sexual orientation is primarily set at birth!" (Fieldnotes, 1/10/08). It took a while for his comments to temper the buzz about the "benefits" of being HIV positive but students eventually – though without closure – dropped the issue as Michaels called on another student to report.

In this case, students were so focused on the client's sexual history and agency-supported "benefits package" that they lost sight of much broader community issues. Michaels tried to connect students' field experiences with earlier studies in Psychology without much success. He also missed the opportunity to help students situate their experiences in broader contexts and issues relevant to the welfare of Riverside's citizens (i.e. the social conditions surrounding clients' experiences, reasons why such services and support are needed in the community, and the prevalence and implications of misconceptions of homosexuality, HIV, and social services).

Aside from incomplete efforts like these to encourage critical analysis of field work, follow up discussions on Wednesdays and Thursdays rarely extended beyond basic reporting. Students' experiences were not used to explore more deeply the social, environmental or economic contexts related to the issues students were researching. Beyond these discussions, students and teachers never discussed their STP work and research in class; there were no curricular opportunities for focused discussions, guided analysis, or research mentoring to help students make sense of and connect their field work, research, and community.

The Second Tuesday Project and the Human Services Course culminated with students' final research symposium. Similar to their diverse field experiences, students research papers and presentations varied in their clarity, coherence, and success. Some students succeeded in clearly identifying a community problem, describing its history and present status, and proposing solutions based on field experiences with related organizations. For example, in Briana's paper studying issues of abuse and neglect in the foster care system, she wrote:

> I believe that abuse of foster children is something that is going to take a lot of people to permanently end, but we can start working on it today by becoming a mentor or by helping out students interested in careers in the social sciences by offering scholarships… Child advocates and case workers, like the ones I had the privilege of working with are key to solving the problem of child abuse in foster homes. (Briana's final paper, 5/8/08)

Here, Briana offered very practical solutions to the issue of abuse in the foster care system tied directly to her experiences in the field.

Kayla-Jean's final paper demonstrated the STP's potential to further students' critical understandings of their community and selves through collaborative community work. Researching issues of identity, culture, and community building, Kayla-Jean spent her second Tuesdays with the Riverside Black Theater Company. Her paper addressed antagonism between African-American teenagers and negativity in the Black community by highlighting the need for youth to embrace the vibrant history of African-American art and culture. She emphasized the role of her organization uplifting the Black community through theater and dance. Kayla-Jean described her issue this way: "…amongst Black youth I see the lack of respect we have for each other…I also see how the influence of [popular] music impacts how we behave towards others in our community…" (Kayla-Jean's final paper, 5/8/08). She argued that participation in community art and culture projects can foster a "sense of community pride by accessing our culture and history…" She suggested that this participation will "help share our sense of pride, identity and knowledge with our community" (Kayla-Jean's final paper, 5/8/08).

Through their community research and participation, both Kayla-Jean and Briana were able to make connections between their individual field experiences, community challenges, the work of agencies and organizations trying to address those challenges, and broader social and cultural contexts.

The majority of student research through the STP was not as clearly articulated. Valerie chose to work at a health clinic to study the issue of affordable health care and spent most of her time in the field filing papers and helping with office tasks. For her final paper and presentation, Valerie did not draw upon any significant field experiences at the clinic to describe patients' struggles with affordable health care. Without any connection to personal experiences or local contexts, Valerie relied upon national statistics and general statements about health care to conclude that the system "needs help." At the end of her paper and presentation she shared a religious poem about overcoming challenges in life through faith. Valerie tied the poem to issues of health care this way:

> In closing, I would like to start by saying when it comes to the struggle of children being provided for, it's not their fault that they have to go though the things they do when it comes to their health… This poem talks about how hard it is on a daily basis to have such a burden on your shoulders… from child abuse to children's health care, communities need to come together and prevent the stress in order to make them better and successful in the future. (Valerie's final paper, 5/8/08)

Valerie's very general summation of her community issue and proposed solution ("communities need to come together") and her inclusion of reference material not directly relevant to her topic was typical of most of the

students' final papers and presentations. Though Michaels and Patterson had outlined in the initial introduction to the STP that students should "implement a plan to help resolve [their] issue" (Course overview handout, 9/7/07), many students failed to even describe the work of their agency in the context of their chosen issue or problem. If students mentioned solutions, it was most often general statements like Valerie's above or Adam's on workforce development: "the community needs to help out the unemployed" (Adam's final paper, 5/8/08).

At the close of each presentation, Michaels facilitated a few minutes of follow up questions and comments. Most comments from the audience focused on the speaker's delivery or enthusiasm ("I couldn't hear you." "You seem bored" (Fieldnotes, 5/6/08)) Questions generally did not move the speaker or the audience to more carefully consider specific issues, experiences, or conclusions but focused on details the questioner felt were left out ("How many children did you tutor?" "Which schools get the donated school supplies?" (Fieldnotes, 5/6/08)).

Faculty expressed frustration with students' struggles to make connections between field work, community issues, and broader social, cultural and economic contexts. Patterson explained:

> When students are doing the research, they don't have the vocabulary to understand it, they read it and it doesn't talk to them. And sometimes they just want to talk about themselves and they don't see themselves as one of the statistics in the big picture. They just keep it at the personal level. (Patterson interview, 2/13/08)

Michaels attributed students' inability to "dig deeper" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08) to their belief that they were living the issues and research would not contribute more to their understanding of the issues. "I think there are some kids who say, 'I live this (poverty, domestic violence, homelessness) every day, I can write about this and I don't need to do much research'" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08). He described students as "removed and unwilling" (Michaels interview, 5/13/08) to look closely at issues related to their personal experiences.

I also observed students struggling to make connections between field experiences, broader community social and environmental issues, and additional research. Their unsuccessful online research attempts, generalized research conclusions, and the absence of field experiences as data for research papers pointed to many students' inability to interpret, contextualize, or make meaning from their community experiences.

Aside from the unplanned, "last minute stroke of inspiration" Graffiti Wall, the curriculum included no activities with the direct intent of helping students clarify and discuss their interests in community issues. As students' research progressed, there were no directed opportunities to share or apply knowledge through discussions, critical response papers, or focused brainstorming, outlining, or analysis. In addition, during classroom discussions after field days, faculty missed opportunities to critically question students about their work, their agencies' role in the community, and broader social, environmental, and economic contexts surrounding their issues. As a roughly held together series of deadlines and activities, the STP curriculum did not foster a sense of cohesiveness either in its daily progression or in the capstone research of the students.

DISCUSSION

Three key themes – logistical flexibility, communication and planning, and curricular connectivity – contributed significantly to the challenges and successes of students and teachers involved in the STP's community-based approaches. In this section, I will explore these themes more carefully, revisiting Patterson's idea of a missing "common language" among faculty as a set of underlying goals, objectives, and guiding theories for community-based practice. I will argue that a common language or grounding theory contributes significantly to the aforementioned themes of communication and planning and curricular connectivity, making it a very essential component of community-based curriculum in the classroom. Further, I will explain how developing a common vision for community-based education in the classroom is central to addressing the pedagogical challenges community-based education presents. I will situate findings in the work and research of other community-based educators, including Knapp (2008) and Keyes & Gregg (2001), and revisit important aspects of the STP's logistical flexibility.

The Human Services classroom, though progressing through a loosely structured curricular timeline, seemed quite fractured on a day to day basis. Students and faculty were unaware of what upcoming days and weeks would look like ("things were just thrown at us…") or how various discussions, assignments, guest speakers, or deadlines related to any unifying course purpose or objective. Curriculum and objectives of Michaels and Patterson were often at odds, each teacher wanting more time for guest speakers and fieldwork or research and writing, respectively. Throughout the year, faculty missed opportunities to help students make connections between their experiences in the field and broader social issues like hunger, HIV/AIDS, and public health during post-field day discussions. The Human Services curriculum, loosely structured and poorly planned, was not organized to include discussions, activities, and guided research that would help students contextualize their experiences, research, and subsequent findings about their community's social and environmental issues. In fact, aside from introducing the STP, setting up placements, going into the field, reporting back to the class, and doing independent research, there was nothing in the curriculum to support students in pulling together their field experiences, interviews, and internet research into coherent arguments about the Riverside community and its social and environmental welfare. As a result, there was a clear disconnect between students' field experience and research as evidenced by their final papers and presentations on local issues and problems.

Patterson described that the pro-

gram lacked a "common language" (Patterson interview, 2/13/08). Spillings, the program administrator described a need for faculty to develop a "common vision" (Spillings interview, 2/15/08) for the Human Services program and the STP. I would argue both educators describe here the need for theory: a set of clearly articulated goals, objectives and assumptions about what teachers and students were doing, why they were doing it, and what students were to gain from such a learning experience. I believe the disconnect between students' field experiences and research, the lack of curricular connectivity, and Patterson's and Michaels' struggles with communication and planning are all related to the program's lack of a "common language," "common vision," or grounding theory.

Instead of formulating materials outlining only what students were to do physically as part of the STP (identify issues/agencies, work in the field, and present and write research papers), a guiding theory would describe students' cognitive tasks (making connections between field work, research, and community contexts), highlighting students' learning. By identifying goals for student learning, faculty could have facilitated students' post-field day discussions to encourage critical analysis of field activities, organizations' community roles, and broader social/environmental/economic issues. With a clear set of goals for learning, faculty could develop additional curriculum to facilitate the cognitive connections between field experiences and community contexts, for example, offering directed lessons on research planning, data collection, data analysis, and formal interpretations. And students, guided by an understanding that these connections were the heart of the project, supported in their research to make such connections, could have better used their field experiences and research to further their understanding of the Riverside community.

When Knapp (2008) reflects on his long history teaching about community-based pedagogies and experiential education, he argues that teaching "means extending the classroom beyond the four walls of the classroom and two covers of books. It means immersing students in direct experiences with people and places in order to learn in the context of realistic community situations" (p. 9). Michaels and Patterson were certainly doing this work with the STP, opening the doors of Jefferson Center High School and supporting authentic student work in the community. But Knapp also explains, "Teaching involves a mandate to challenge students to think reflectively. Thinking deeply about how learning is taking place and how knowledge will be applied to life is an important path to knowledge" (p. 9). Knapp draws upon characteristics and principles of experiential education when he claims, "The educator's primary roles include structuring suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, ensuring safety, and facilitating learning" (p. 13). In these arguments, his emphasis on teachers as *facilitators of reflective thinking* is essential; it is one of the critical components Michaels and Patterson missed.

Community-based educators and researchers emphasize the need for connectivity, theory, and purpose in community-based projects and partnerships. Keyes & Gregg (2001) explain that in the strongest school-community partnerships,

> people hold a common vision and care enough about their vision to be willing to share information and power to achieve it. The quality of relationships among people seems to be the critical element within schools, within communities, and between schools and communities. (p. 44)

The educators and students participating in the Second Tuesday Project did not share a common vision. Without it, faculty struggled with curricular planning and implementation and many students failed to understand the relevance of their work.

In terms of the logistical and structural challenges to community-based education efforts, the Human Services classroom took great advantage of its small school-within-a-school program and many community resources. The ability to restructure the schedule and location of a typical school day afforded the Human Services students an authentic involvement in community life and city services. Allowing students to be present at agencies during productive hours of the work day enabled them to participate in active, real work, further involving them in the day-to-day life of the community. Keyes and Gregg (2001) explain that flexibility like this is essential in school-community relationships:

> The form of a school's relationship to community - whether it is that of community center, school-based enterprise benefiting the community, or community as curriculum - must be determined locally and will depend on the motivating force. To be successful, all three require reconceptualizing traditional roles, protocols, and uses of school time. All three require school personnel to be flexible and to have a tolerance for risk, uncertainty, and a certain amount of messiness. (p. 45)

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) explore similar types of organizational and conceptual changes that need to be made to traditional schooling to enable vibrant community and place-based projects in the classroom. Certainly, the Second Tuesday Project demonstrated how school spatial organization, small school-within-a-school programs, and localized administration enabled students and teachers the freedom to take advantage of authentic community-based learning opportunities.

In terms of the curricular, cognitive challenges of integrating community-based learning into a traditional classroom, the Human Services program struggled. Without grounding theory, common vision and shared sense of purpose, teachers and students were unable to take full advantage of their authentic community experiences – unable to integrate valuable firsthand experiences and research into broader social and environmental contexts. Students' work in the community became a disconnected, fractured experience, still separate from their traditional academic papers and presentations.

IMPLICATIONS

At the outset of this study, I asked three questions in regards to community-based learning in the classroom: how do teachers and students experience community-school partnerships in the classroom? What elements of community-based curriculum make it most meaningful? And, what insight do these findings offer other educators interested in community-school partnerships and community-based education?

It seems that the teachers in the Human Services program, challenged by uncertain course schedules and last minute teaching assignments, were more focused on the logistics of getting students out into the community than on the critical curricular work that needed to happen when students came back to the classroom. In the STP, students experienced a diversity of field placements and agencies and were engaged in authentic work on a regular basis in the Riverside community. School administrators, parents, and faculty shared a belief that this work was meaningful, valuable and deserving of the logistical flexibility and freedoms those educators and parents gave to the program. But educators experienced frustration with students' inability to make connections between their field work and academic research; teachers attributed some of their struggles with the STP to a lack of common purpose, vision, and language for the project. Without these things, the teachers overlooked the need for classroom curriculum that would help students contextualize, analyze, and understand more deeply the role of their work within the Riverside community.

Clearly, for educators interested in adopting community-school partnerships and community-based pedagogies, it is essential to thoughtfully articulate a common vision, theory, goals and objectives for community-school partnerships. Importantly, administrators and educators must set aside time to do this important planning. Educators also need clear lines of communication with students, faculty, and community partners regarding their community and classroom work. Planning must be ongoing and within the context of the course objectives in order to create cohesive and meaningful curriculum. A key component of supporting community-based classroom curriculum is implementing the support structures (discussions, activities, mentorships, individualized instruction) designed to help students make sense of their experiences in broader community contexts. Finally, educators and administrators must find ways, like the Human Services Program did, to remove the traditional barriers between schools and communities, allowing students to participate in active, authentic work outside school walls.

Missing from this study were the voices of community partners. Because of time constraints and logistical challenges, I was unable to go with students into the field or to talk formally with their mentors. Thus I did not fully describe the role community partners played in students' STP experiences. Aside from reviewing formal communications with participating community partners (introductory materials, time sheets, permission slips), observing Michaels' telephone discussions with community partners in regards to initial program logistics and, later, to attendance and student performance, I had no direct contact with community partners. Students returned from the field with a wide variety of experiences, knowledge, and insights. It seemed some mentors were very helpful explaining to students the role of their organization in broader social contexts and issues and others seemed more hands-off, setting students to task and letting them go. Though a clearer understanding of what happened in the field and the perspectives of the community partners would have been helpful in order to describe the STP more fully, the emphasis of my questions was on the curriculum, teaching and learning that happened *in the classroom* to support students through the STP. As a former educator interested in how teachers and students grapple with the integration of place-based pedagogies and community-school partnerships, I wanted to look most closely at their experiences, framed by the structures and contexts of a traditional school environment.

Program Facilitator Spillings remained a strong supporter of the Second Tuesday Project throughout the school year. He explained:

> Any time you get a student into a new environment it's beneficial. Probably for you, certainly for me, when we look back at high school, junior high, we remember our field trips - a lot of them, maybe not all of them. Imagine a field trip that was a service opportunity that was repeated seven or eight times or maybe in the future weekly for maybe 30 weeks. The ties you build, the understanding you have of adult working relationships… that's what you want, that's what you want your high school to do, to be a partner with your community. That's what it should be. It sort of seems strange that school is so isolated from our community - that we take kids and say, "go do that [elementary school] and then go do that [high school] and then come join us…" When the community should be saying, "let's help you do that, let's help you do that…" (Spillings interview, 2/15/08)

Even with its challenges, the Second Tuesday Project demonstrated the potential of community-based learning and school-community partnerships. Students like Briana, and Kayla-Jean had insightful and inspiring experiences that changed the way they understood their city and community. With logistical flexibility and a strong and clearly articulated sense of purpose, school-community partnerships have the potential to enrich, expand, and authenticate learning environments for students.

This study has underscored the need for research on the struggles, challenges and successes of community-based programs and partnerships in the schools. Additional research is needed examining the experiences of community partners and how their participation and experiences with school-community partnerships contribute to classroom curriculum and student learning. Importantly, I have argued in this study that community-school partnerships and community-based curric-

ulum must do much more than simply get students out into the community. Educators must plan ahead to assure logistical flexibility, establish clear lines of communication with all partners, and develop cohesive, directed curriculum based on guiding goals and shared visions of what students will do and learn through their participation in community-school partnerships. As evidenced by the struggles and successes of the novice Second Tuesday Project, there is much to be learned from community-based practices, but educators must be thoughtful, deliberate, and directed in supporting community-based learning in the classroom.

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ENDNOTE

[1]All identifying references to people, places and institutions have been changed.

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