Engaging professional advocacy through community-based participatory research and community engagement

Anastasha Homa-Earl

Duquesne University

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INTRODUCTION

Community Engagement
- Community engagement (CE) and service learning as trends in higher education as a way to enhance learning (Henderson, 2017; Johnson, 2013).
- CE can elevate institutions of higher education as community assets (Graber, Chodzko-Zolaj, O’Connor, & Linker, 2017).
- Combines resources and efforts between universities and communities—mutually beneficial relationship
  - Many students maintain relationships with their CE community partners, even after their coursework commitment has ended (Henderson, 2017).
  - Students can find opportunity to grow and utilize marketable professional skills in a meaningful context (Johnson, 2013).
  - Increases civic responsibility and desire to take action, opportunity for leadership skills, and improved interpersonal skill (Fulton & Shannonhouse, 2014).

Professional Identity, Interpersonal Collaboration, & Advocacy
- Professional obligation to advocate for clients and the profession while also creating change in the community (ACA, 2014; ACA 2011).
- Collaboration helps advocacy efforts, and advocacy and experiential learning develop professional identity (Mellis, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002).
- CE provides opportunity for social justice advocacy in particular (Mitchel, 2017).

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)
- Equitable collaboration to empower communities and amplify voices of all relevant stakeholders (Hergenrather et al., 2010).
- CE should seek to redistribute power back to the service recipients or stakeholders (Mitchell, 2017).
- CBPR empowers communities in collaboration with students and faculty to combine efforts and resources in a way that is actually meaningful to the population served and to the student.

Goals of Present Project
- Engaging professional advocacy through community-based participatory research and community engagement.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Special thanks to all community partners who welcomed the students to collaborate with their agencies. Additional acknowledgments to Dr. Yin-Hsing Liu for her support, guidance, and help in conducting this project.

METHODS

Participants
- Participants were all masters-level students within the Counselor Education program at Duquesne University.
- Participation occurred as part of a required “counselor counseling” course.
- Data was collected from two sections of this class: one in 2017 (n=15) and one in 2018 (n=15).
- In 2017, students partnered with five community organizations; students partnered with seven community organizations in 2018. Of these partnerships, three participated both years.

Measures
- Students submitted reflections of their CE experience following the project.
- Themes within the reflections were analyzed using grounded theory.

Student Experience
- CBPR approach to problem-solving within the communities: Students worked closely with their community partners to address community needs.
- Required collaboration with stakeholders (clients, administration, etc.) to see what the concerns were within the community.
- Students were active participants in designing and implementing programs that helped address the needs indicated by the stakeholders, including:
  - Designing awareness campaigns;
  - Assisting in fundraising efforts;
  - Interacting with clients;
  - Developing programming;
  - Implementing program activities and initiatives.

2017
- Bias
  - Community
  - Community engagement
  - Community trauma
  - Empowerment
- Importance of community resources
- Lack of community resources
- Multiculturalism
- Privilege
- Trauma
- Accessibility
- Accessibility and advocacy
- Advocacy and problem-solving
- Advocacy and resource acquisition
- Advocacy for accessibility
- Individual accommodation
- Lack of accessibility
- Understanding

2018
- Privilege (and lack thereof)
- Complexity
- Lack of resources
- Multicultural factors
- Need for resources
- Poverty vs. culture
- Privilege
- Socialization
- Stigma
- Accessibility
- Accessibility of services
- Advocacy
- Advocacy for accessibility
- Advocacy for resources
- Advocacy through awareness
- Advocacy through remembrance
- Advocacy/awareness
- Awareness
- Evidence-based advocacy
- Hope
- Need for advocacy/awareness
- Rapport
- Systematic resistance to change

THEMES

2017
- Academic integration
- Details
- Empowerment through practice
- Growth
- Professional identity—title
- Professional interest
- Professional role
- Professional role/identity
- Service learning
- Similarities between self and client

2018
- Advocacy
- Awareness/understanding
- Building on prior experience
- Empowerment
- Experiential learning
- Lack of knowledge
- Personal growth
- Rapport
- Real-life application
- Relationship building
- Relationships in service of others
- Self-serving relationships
- Tactile learning

REFERENCES


QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

- Preliminary analyses of student reflections indicate 48 salient themes for the students in 2017 and 50 salient themes in 2018.
- Themes of advocacy seem particularly relevant with 23 themes identified pertaining to the topic in 2018 and 22 identified in 2017—particularly regarding advocacy for client/community concerns such as accessibility of services, lack of resources, and concerns relating to multiculturalism and privilege.
- Themes relating professional identity and to interprofessional collaboration were also explored, with slightly more themes reflecting students’ perceptions of identity (ten in 2017 and 13 in 2018) than interprofessional collaboration (eight in 2017 and nine in 2018).
- Preliminary findings suggest that participation in this CBPR-based CE project was successful in engaging students to think about issues of advocacy, professional identity, and interprofessional collaboration. The researchers plan to further analyze the data to explore the themes more deeply.

SUMMARY/ CONCLUSIONS

Limitations
- Small sample size (n = 30) means that data saturation may not have been reached and that it was difficult to collect quantitative data.
- Implementation of a program such as this requires a great number of resources and a great deal of time, requiring as large an effort on behalf of both the instructor and the students.
- Sites varied greatly in terms of how they operate, administrative involvement, and resources available, which means student experience varied greatly as well.

Implications and Future Directions
- More research is needed to examine the effects of CE across academic disciplines.
- Recommendations for Practical Implementation in Higher Ed
  - Work from a model of community-driven needs assessment and collaborative partnership to develop CE projects that assist the targeted populations in ways that are empowering to the student and multi-competent.
  - Further explore social justice and advocacy through reflection of personal identity such as the degree and effect of exposure to privilege and oppression based on one’s multicultural identity and learnings (Henderson, 2017; Mitchel, 2017).
  - Build CE into existing coursework where possible to maximize allocation of funding and resources (Henderson, 2017; Johnson, 2012).
  - Use CE as an experimental intervention that positively affects both the stakeholder and the student-participant.
- Multicultural competence is essential for students working within diverse communities and should be emphasized throughout the CE process (ACA, 2014), as should adherence to other ethical guidelines.
- Students should be supervised throughout the process to assist in competent practice.

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Anastasia Homa-Earl, MS, NCC
Counselor Education & Supervision; Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education

American Counseling Association. (2018). (461) 916-0864. foncho@alcoa.com