Practice Stories
The Need for Improving Intercultural Collaborative Activities With Structured Institutional Systems of Support

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Abstract

Evaluation of an international, grant-funded program must communicate the program's value to a variety of stakeholders: the funder, the agency operating the program and its community, and the citizens of the country where the program is implemented. An intercultural research team can achieve that goal only through a thought-out strategy. This article summarizes the challenges that intercultural teams of researchers faced as they crisscrossed a host country while evaluating a teaching and learning materials program. It concludes with three recommendations for effective collaboration: (1) Research coordinators must use rigor in selecting researchers and research assistants. (2) Researchers must receive in-depth and extensive training in both intercultural collaboration and evaluation skills. (3) Institutions involved in intercultural collaborative projects should have an intentional structure for ensuring that orientation curricula are aligned or adjusted to project objectives and that logistical arrangements are coordinated through an intercultural response mechanism.

Introduction

The ultimate purpose of program evaluation is “contributing to the provision of quality services to people in need” (Posavac, 2011, p. 13). In collaborative program evaluation, as well as other community-based research or service-learning activities involving different cultures, accomplishing this purpose can be a challenge. Challenges may include communication (Lin, Chen, & Chiu, 2012; O’Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007; Oetzel, 2002), ethical issues in program evaluation design and field access (Marshall & Batten, 2003), realities of the context of the partnership (McIntyre, 2008), and the decision-making process among groups (Freeman & Gahungu, 2013). These challenges seem to originate both from visiting evaluators’ unfamiliarity with the cultural context of the program being evaluated and the extent to which members of the host community share the same understanding of the purpose of the evaluation. For example, in their evaluation of health programs for Hispanics in rural settings, Aguado Loi and
McDermott (2010) recommended that evaluators be skilled; have experience and training in cultural competence in the population affected by the program; be well versed in techniques of program evaluation, including interpersonal skills; and be able to gain and maintain the trust of key stakeholders of the program (p. 255).

In particular, in projects that employ students as assistant field researchers, Latimore, Dreelin, and Burroughs (2014) recommended that students participating in such outreach and engagement activities “should be provided opportunities to learn effective communication and engagement strategies through coursework and experiences that are integrated into their degree programs” (p. 147). The authors also stressed the dilemma faced by university units in providing guidance and support to faculty advisors and students regarding effective outreach and engagement. On one hand, engagement and outreach activities are expected to be part of the mission of universities in the 21st century. As Ramaley (2014) challenges,

In the 21st century, universities will focus on a number of signature themes that reflect both their academic interests and the characteristics of the communities and regions that they serve. Institutions will build extensive collaborative partnerships with other universities, sectors of society, local communities, and even nations to generate knowledge, address societal challenges, and create learning environments in which to educate their students. Universities will work together to address the needs of a much more diverse student population and to enhance the overall level of persistence and success in the educational environments created both by individual institutions and by networks of cooperating institutions. (p. 18)

On the other hand, however, creating a responsive culture of engagement can be difficult because promotion and tenure systems do not encourage such activities, and they receive inadequate financial support (Demb & Wade, 2012).

Using the case of a cross-cultural collaborative evaluation of a grant-funded learning materials project conducted by a team of researchers from the host country and the United States, this article aimed to explore the extent to which the following factors influenced effective intercultural collaboration on program evaluation: research skills, intercultural competence, establishment of a shared
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performance system, and navigation of the institutional bureaucracy maze. The authors propose simple guidelines from the field for effective collaboration on international, intercultural program evaluation, as well as recommendations for providing necessary support for international outreach and engagement activities at the institutional level.

Literature Review

The extent to which collaborative teams, in general, and intercultural teams, in particular, achieve responsive and effective program evaluation can be gauged using the lofty premises of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation’s Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). The Joint Committee identified 30 standards for program evaluation and grouped them into five categories: utility standards, feasibility standards, propriety standards, accuracy standards, and evaluation accountability standards. Although program evaluators are expected to demonstrate satisfactory skills in all 30 standards, three standards particularly stand out in an intercultural collaborative context. First and foremost is the evaluator credibility standard—the first utility standard—which emphatically prescribes, “Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context” (U1 Evaluator Credibility). Equally important is the fifth accuracy standard: “Evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods” (A5 Information Management). The numbering of standards is illustrated below. Most important is the expectation of the second propriety standard (P2 Formal Agreements): “Evaluation agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other stakeholders.” All in all, however, satisfactory performance of an evaluation task must be assessed against all five program evaluation categories:


2. Feasibility: Feasibility discusses the effects of contexts, cultures, costs, politics, power, available resources, and other factors on evaluations.
3. **Propriety**: Propriety (refers) to the moral, ethical, and legal concerns related to evaluation quality.

4. **Accuracy**: Accuracy discusses reliability, validity, and reduction of error and bias.

5. **Accountability**: Evaluation accountability… results from balancing utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. *(Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. xxviii)*

Within these expectations, international intercultural collaboration in program evaluation, as part of university-sponsored activities involving faculty, staff, and students, falls within the broader context of international engagement *(DeZure et al., 2012)*. In their study of four U.S. university teaching centers in Egypt, Iraq, Singapore, and Thailand, DeZure et al. *(2012)* indicated that an institution that encourages “international education and intercultural partnerships can expect to broaden the perspectives and enhance the learning of students, staff, faculty, academic leaders, and the broader community it serves” *(p. 32)*. However, this outcome depends on many factors, chief among which are that collaborating institutions know the context of their international partner(s), both parties can benefit from the venture, and both can create a common ground.

Similarly, in a study of U.S. students’ personal challenges in a service-learning project in Tanzania, Nickols, Rothenberg, Moshi, and Tetloff *(2013)* identified several barriers to the intercultural competence required to function effectively in an international context. These challenges included feelings of being “too American” *(p. 106)* to understand the context of the project and a recognition of “gaps in expectations” *(p. 112)* between community participants and visiting students. This lack of mutual understanding could jeopardize, in turn, the best intentions of mixed teams of evaluators to be responsive to the program’s “changes in context, data availability, or their own evolving understanding of the context” *(Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010, p. 18)*. It could be argued that Aguado Lao and McDermott’s *(2010)* evaluation of programs for Hispanics in rural settings did not call for skills comparable to the intercultural competency required for cross-border collaborative projects and that Nickols et al.’s *(2013)* service-learning project in Tanzania was not program evaluation per se. Nonetheless, both activities addressed the “provision of quality services to people in need” in another cul-
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For both activities, the risk of imposing, or being afraid of imposing, one’s ethnocentric value system onto a host community is of paramount concern.

As Schneider and Romberg (2011) cautioned, this lack of mutual understanding will persist as long as cross-cultural teams continue to receive training that emphasizes communication barriers alone. Such training does not provide the foundation for high-performing intercultural teams. According to the authors, intercultural teams must experience three phases to achieve effective performance: intercultural awareness, a shared performance system, and intercultural communication.

At the intercultural awareness phase, “the goal is not to fully understand the other culture, but rather to accept that each culture has a valid logic” (p. 46). At the shared awareness phase, team members aim to “negotiate a shared performance system” (p. 46). The authors explain, “If there is little agreement about what performance should look like, it is hard to work together cohesively” (p. 46). After teams have developed a shared performance system, they can learn “skills for communicating effectively in work situations” (p. 47). Otherwise, cross-cultural teams will continue exhibiting “insecurities in interactions with each other” (p. 47).

Although most universities include international community outreach and engagement in their missions, the statements do not always translate into policies or support commitment. According to Demb and Wade’s (2012) survey, not only are such activities time consuming, but the current tenure system did not encourage faculty to participate in engagement activities, financial support for such activities was inadequate, and faculty participation lacked a support infrastructure. Rather than sending faculty and students to those culturally sensitive and adventurous activities without a backup infrastructure or a form of extrinsic motivation, Demb and Wade (2012) recommended that institutions could assist faculty with identifying community partners, and/or developing standard patterns for collaborative agreements, that can support either research partnerships or responsibilities for student internships. This might mean creating a category of “partnership specialists” who offer support across the campus. (p. 362)
Methods

Research Design

This report is a case study in which the authors tell the stories of the collaboration between a group of U.S. faculty, staff, and students on one side and a group of African faculty, staff, and students on the other side. The authors reviewed notes and reflections about the collaboration between and within the two groups from different sources—notes from a preorientation course that the students took, comments from a 1-week predeparture workshop in the United States, comments from a 1-week combined workshop in the host country, field journal reflections, notes from field briefings and debriefings, notes from an unpublished student-created postfield video and pamphlet, and a reflection forum. In addition, the authors asked researchers via e-mail to provide their thoughts about how the African and American researchers worked together within teams, the challenges they faced, and recommendations for future projects. The same questions were asked by telephone for clarification. In this article, the country where the evaluation took place will be referred to as the host country.

The authors chose a method of inquiry that used the voices of the researchers exclusively because, as Savin-Baden and van Niekerk (2007) advocated, “stories are the closest we can come to shared experience” (p. 462). This case study is both a restorying (Creswell, 2007) of the events that happened during 2 months of collaboration between African and American researchers on a federally funded project and a reflection of two key researchers—one American researcher who was born and educated in Africa, who was also the evaluation coordinator, and one American researcher who led one of the research teams. As Creswell clarified, “active participation with the participant is necessary, and researchers need to discuss the participants’ stories as well as be reflective about their own personal and political background, which shapes how they restory the account” (p. 57).

Study Background

In 2005, with a grant from an American agency, a U.S. university embarked on a collaborative project with officials of an African country to produce and disseminate school materials for the country’s early childhood programs. The materials were distributed nationwide to the schools in 2008 and 2009. Toward the end of 2009 and after the first 2 years of the program, a team of
researchers from the university developed a proposal for evaluating the extent of use of the materials and their impact. The proposal was vetted by partners in the host country. The final version of the evaluation proposal and protocols was completed in March 2010 and approved by both the receiving country’s ministry of education and the university’s institutional review board in May 2010.

In June 2010, after 2 weeks of intensive training in program evaluation methodology, five researchers and six student interns from the university traveled to Africa, where they were joined by three researchers and six students from the host country. On the American side, the researchers, including the evaluation coordinator, were selected because of their involvement in the development of the project and affiliation with the center that administered the project. The African side selected researchers from two education universities, primarily because of the universities’ role in the adoption of the teaching and learning materials produced by the project. Both groups received more methodology training together for another week. The evaluation coordinator used the manual *Program Assessment Guidelines for Field Researchers* (Gahungu, 2010), tailoring it to the specific program evaluation project. In order to cover the whole country, researchers and interns were divided into five teams. Each team, composed of host country and American researchers, covered several contiguous school districts where they observed teachers and students using the materials and interviewed teachers and parents. In addition, the researchers also administered and collected surveys from teachers, head teachers, and other high-ranking administrators.

Each day during the fieldwork, researchers were required to keep a journal of their activities and lessons learned from the excursions. The experiences were shared within each of the five groups. After the individual group sessions, the evaluation coordinator hosted a teleconference with all team leaders to review the work progress and challenges met. All of those experiences culminated in a 1-day postevaluation reflection for all groups, where researchers shared their research and intercultural lessons. Key stakeholders of the program—the funding agency director in the host country, representatives from the country’s ministry of education, members of the project advisory boards, and other officials—joined the researchers for the discussions. The last 2 hours of the postevaluation day were devoted to a short play in which the researchers portrayed their 2 months on the road, living in unfamiliar conditions, working with people from a different culture, eating different kinds of foods, and (for the first time for some
interns) conducting field research. The activities discussed in this article were approved by the U.S. university’s institutional review board, as well as by the ministry of education in the host country.

Stories From the Field

The analyses reported in the following paragraphs summarize both the voices of the participants and the authors’ retrospective self-reflections as research coordinators. The following summaries thus serve as an assessment of dispositions, performance, and resources needed for similar intercultural collaborative activities. Analyses are grouped around the following themes: (a) adherence to procedures and professionalism, (b) intercultural competence, (c) establishment of a shared performance system, and (d) navigating the institutional bureaucracy maze. These analyses lay the foundation for the Discussion and Recommendations sections of this article, which address obstacles to readiness for participants as well as requirements for institutional readiness for international outreach and engagement.

Adherence to Procedures and Professionalism

Verifying whether the evaluation teams were composed of qualified people who had the necessary research and evaluation skills was not easy. For the project at hand, the main research activities consisted of interviewing teachers and parents; observing teachers; and administering a survey to teachers, head teachers, district administrators, and national officials in order to ascertain the extent of use and impact of the materials on the end users. For both groups of evaluators, the main task was to verify that the materials had not only been produced and delivered to the schools, but were utilized and were having an impact in the classrooms. Each group also had specific expectations. Each researcher from the host country was assigned to a group and an area reflecting his or her understanding of the communities using the materials coupled with a good knowledge of the languages of communication, the customs of the places, and the physical terrain. Since the Americans’ knowledge of the terrain was limited, they were expected to contribute mainly in the execution of the evaluation and analysis procedures.

Consistently, in all teams, team leaders’ main task was to facilitate debriefings after each day’s work and briefings in the morning about the work ahead. They verified that all instruments were assembled prior to field trips and reviewed the data collected for
thoroughness every evening. Team leaders were the main interviewers of teachers, head teachers, and other higher level officials. Host country team researchers were primarily responsible for interviewing parents. For transportation to field sites, the project had subcontracted drivers. Although the drivers were not part of the research teams and did not participate in orientation sessions, they knew the terrain and the languages and thus served as indispensable guides, translators, and cultural liaisons.

In addition to performing fieldwork, researchers took the time to visit places of cultural interest. Knowledgeable in-country team members and a logistics coordinator for the project were instrumental to these activities. At the conclusion of the summer project, U.S. student researchers were required to complete a survey about these cultural experiences and their fieldwork. Once the survey was completed and returned to the Office of International Programs, the students received a grade for the summer experience. The following paragraphs describe the five teams of researchers in terms of their complementary skills.

Team 1 conducted the evaluation around the host country’s capital city. It consisted of four members. The team leader was an assistant professor of reading in the U.S. Although she had not conducted research overseas before, her prior experience as a school principal in the United States, coupled with her reading credentials, enabled her to understand the evaluation tasks at hand, particularly the observations of teachers. There were two U.S. undergraduate students on this team, a physical education major and a business major. The fourth member of the team was an undergraduate education major in the host country. In addition to being a student, the fourth member had been a teacher for several years. She played an essential role as translator, guide, interviewer, and go-to person for any outstanding questions about the local context.

Team 2 conducted research in the eastern, central, and western regions of the country. It consisted of a U.S. team leader, two student interns from the host country, one U.S. student intern, and a driver. The team leader, an assistant professor of elementary education in the United States, had participated in the design of the evaluation project and had been to the host country with the evaluation coordinator to conduct preassessment activities the previous year. The two student interns from the host country were both education majors, one at the undergraduate level and the other at the graduate level. Both were familiar with the languages spoken there. Because the American student intern, a graduate art education major, was a teacher, she was instrumental in interviewing and observations.
Team 3 was in the northern part of the country, the farthest from the capital city. The team leader was the evaluation project coordinator and a professor of educational leadership and administration in the United States. He codesigned the methodology of the evaluation project and developed field research guidelines that he used to train the researchers. His previous experiences included working on international projects. He also had participated in the preassessment of the project the previous year. The team members consisted of a researcher from the host country’s university, a student intern majoring in business in the United States, and a driver. Although the host country researcher was not from that region, he was familiar with the region’s language and customs. In that capacity, he served as the team’s guide, translator, interviewer, and observer. The U.S. student’s business skills were very useful in organizing interview and observation transcripts and in returning survey questionnaires. She also helped with taking notes during interviews and class observations.

Team 4 consisted of two team leaders, a co–team leader, two students, and a driver. It conducted the evaluation in part of the northern region of the country. One of the team leaders was a high official from the host country. This official was able to attend only the combined training in field research methodology; however, because of professional obligations, the official was unable to join the team in the field. Because of the official’s absence, the U.S. logistics coordinator for the project was selected to act as co-team leader. The researcher on the team was a doctoral student from the host country, as well as an educator and a university-affiliated professional who had previously conducted program evaluations. Although not the leader of the team, he helped with all the aspects of the work including interviewing, observing teachers, and serving as liaison with the community. The U.S. student was a graduate business major who was traveling abroad for the first time.

Team 5 conducted research in the eastern and central regions of the country. It was led by a researcher in the host country’s curriculum and research development office. She was assisted by a doctoral student from the United States who was also writing his dissertation on the project. With them were a graduate business major intern from the U.S. and a host country undergraduate education major. As in other teams, the citizens from the host country were primarily responsible for the interviews and translation.

As the description above shows, teams were unequally balanced both in group representation and in skills. The disparity came from several sources. First, some U.S. evaluators asked to
work relatively near the country’s capital; they did not want to venture too far. Thus, Team 1 did not have an evaluator who had previously worked on a grant-funded project. Similarly, one of the teams did not have a researcher from the U.S., and its experienced team leader from the host country was unable to participate in activities.

In addition, criticism was expressed regarding the backgrounds of the researchers, and the overall qualification of some U.S. student interns was questioned. Some researchers were concerned that student interns did not have enough background to conduct research in schools, particularly since they had to observe teaching, interview teachers and parents, and assess the worth of teaching materials used in schools. One host country evaluator commented, however, when education research is being conducted, I think that all of those involved need to be education majors or working in the field of education. Only two of the six students from the U.S. were students majoring in education. All of those participating who were from [the host country] were students majoring in education, teachers and/or working in an area of education. The U.S. students were productive and cooperative, but we were conducting education research in schools. It seemed to show a lack of regard for the field to send people to observe classes and do the research who were not members of the field. I wonder if it sends a message that one’s training does not matter when it comes to education; anyone can do whatever is necessary to complete the educational task.

Intercultural Competence

Although the American student interns had taken an entire semester of a study abroad course in which they learned about the culture of the host country, followed by 3 weeks of orientation to field research and evaluation methodologies, some researchers reported that they had had inadequate or incomplete orientation about the research context. They observed that little was done to allay researchers’ fears about where they would be going and what they would be doing. One researcher voiced disappointment in the shortcomings of the orientation:

Some field researchers were upset that they were being asked to go to certain areas. Some field researchers were
so afraid of the area they were being posted because the orientation was that such areas were without good drinking water, electricity or internet. A better orientation on the research context is needed in the future.

Other researchers countered the criticism by pointing to the educational nature of the project. Notably, one researcher described the steep learning curve she faced as a result of misinformation about Africa she had acquired through school. According to her, a short orientation course away from the field could not calm her fears of doing research in a foreign culture. The researcher reflected,

Traveling to [the host country] on this research trip gradually dispelled so many of my indoctrinations and beliefs. I was so impressed with the students. In [the host country], education is a prized possession.

Indeed, most student interns from the United States, as well as some seasoned researchers, had not traveled abroad, let alone in the host country. Their thought processes initially revolved around contrasts in the learning and teaching environment. Slowly, those thought processes shifted from misunderstandings to appreciation of the context. Statements by several American researchers illustrate that gradual shift:

The largest class we visited had about 70 students. There was no indoor space for them. The Head Teacher placed benches and a blackboard under the trees to protect the children from the sun and rain. Some children sat on the ground because there was no space on the benches. Those children without a bench seat sat on the ground and completed the assigned exercises in their books [*sic*].

The schools place the students into classes according to their academic ability. There were 8-year olds in the Kindergarten classes. I witnessed a 14 and a 16-year old in a Kindergarten class because this was their first time in school. The older students participated just as the younger members of the class.
Classes were observed with over 50 children in a class with one teacher and sometimes as many as 150 4- and 5-year olds.

Why do we, in the U.S., think that more than 30 children in a class is catastrophe?

The children were amazing. Regardless of their learning environment, they were smiling and seemed happy to be learning.

Some schools did not have the amenities of schools in the U.S. (electricity in the classroom, indoor plumbing for restrooms, computers, smart boards, etc.), but the 5-year-old children were quite capable of reading and able to use phonics in a manner that would challenge 3rd and 4th graders in the U.S.

By the end of the project, because the initial apprehensions had been sufficiently allayed, researchers of both countries were learning from the experiences of working in mixed teams, interviewing parents and teachers, and going to cultural sites such as the slave castles and baths. Interns from both countries offered statements that reflected their new understandings:

[The project] helped me gain a better understanding of the lives and hearts of others. (Host country intern)

[I] visited [a] slave castle again. It had more of an impact because I was with American students. (Host country intern)

I gained an understanding of my own soul. (U.S. intern)

The transformation from curious, fearful interns and researchers was so powerful that these startling assessments were made at the end of the project:

It was a blessing to go. (U.S. intern)
I want to return to [the host country]. I want to return to [the host country], become involved in education and recreation. (U.S. intern)

I want to return to [the host country] and bring my children to live here. (U.S. intern)

There were misconceptions and misinformation of the African students concerning the U.S. “People in the U.S. are rich. They acquire material items without exerting much effort.” (Host country intern)

As a matter of fact, one U.S. student intern has returned to the host country and is now considering making it her country. However, beyond adaptation, one must understand the complexity of conducting research in another culture. Researchers, both African and American, observed how difficult it was for members of the visiting culture to be fully accepted. One American researcher shared:

The U.S. members, although treated politely, were considered foreigners. Being in and being seen in a group with those who lived in [host country] gave our group more acceptance.

One host country researcher went further and suggested that interview respondents may have not provided truthful responses to questions, but rather purposely appealed to the foreignness of the interviewers. In other words, the responses may not have reflected the extent of use of the materials provided by the school materials project or whether they had had an impact. Instead, respondents may have purposely depicted inadequate use and negative impact of the materials so that the assistance would continue. One of the researchers then recommended that the report should account for that “social desirability” effect:

What I observed particularly in [location redacted] is that some respondents were purposively giving responses that suggest they had a message for the American group. The responses were not addressing the questions but rather tilted towards expressing “a concern for help”. I also think that the foreigner dimensions made some respondents to give fit for purpose
responses to the questions [sic]. I believe some of the responses were products of “social desirability effects.” I think the analysis (and the methodology section) should account for that possibility.

Adaptation was made even more challenging by unavoidable incidents among team members. For instance, on the first day of fieldwork, one U.S. team member stopped at a “squatting” toilet. The toilet became a subject of conversations, giggling, and jokes, which almost divided the teams along cultural lines. In retrospect, had the team leaders addressed the issue not only in terms of the functionality of the toilet, but also by drawing attention to the pervasiveness of the technology in the United States and the rest of the world, the rifts would have been avoided. The real issue, it seems, was ignorance and limited instruction prior to the trip, which led such a trivial incident to escalate into a subject of mockery, bashing, teasing, and tensions between the groups.

Finally, successful team leaders were people-to-people ambassadors who truly understood the political and social context of the evaluation. Several had never worked in a system where one had to be chauffeured to research sites. Managing and receiving guidance from the driver was a new learning opportunity. The drivers acted as interpreters and liaisons but were not invited to field orientation meetings and did not participate in briefings and debriefings; the cost of their involvement beyond driving was not included in the project. Consequently, there was little guarantee that drivers conveyed the information on the scripts, which presented potential problems with respect to the ethical conduct of the field research. After all, drivers were not trained researchers. On the other hand, team leaders were aware that overrelying on the good will of subcontracted drivers was not an easy arrangement; besides, team leaders had no supervisory authority over the drivers.

Similarly, adjusting to the use of the correct etiquette when interacting with host country stakeholders was significant. A number of high-ranking administrators, particularly in the ministry of education, were elected officials and thus were referred to as “Honorable.” Professional counterparts were referred to by socially accepted forms of address to which researchers were not accustomed. Although people seemed to find being called “Mrs.” or “Mr.” acceptable, being conversant with the use of “Auntie,” “Mama,” or “Uncle” made access to the field site easier.
Establishment of a Shared Performance System

Beyond the journey, one must revisit the extent to which the teams accomplished their program evaluation mission and cohesively collaborated. No systematic metaevaluation of the project was conducted to specifically ask the researchers to appraise their performance collectively or in their mixed teams. Therefore, statements taken from all sources of information are used to infer the existence or nonexistence of a shared performance system between the two groups of researchers.

As previously described, both groups of researchers received training in field research in general and in program evaluation in particular. All researchers practiced mock interviews, teaching observations, and survey administration techniques. They also reviewed ethical guidelines in field research in general and program evaluation in particular. For 2 weeks—1 week in the United States and 1 week in the host country—researchers discussed and demonstrated at length the ethical and practical considerations of program evaluation.

This training attempted to establish a mutually agreed-upon and shared purpose for the evaluation. Once in smaller groups, the primary responsibility of team leaders was to continuously reinforce this frame of reference. Each morning before going to the schools, team leaders would speak to their team members about the nonnegotiable items of the evaluation, as well as elements that were flexible. Each evening after fieldwork, the team met again to evaluate their day’s work and plan for the following day. The lead researchers set up a teleconference with the other team leaders to discuss their progress and the challenges, if any, they had faced.

Despite the preparation and the cautions, departures from the agreed-upon practices were often observed. For instance, in their reflections, several host country researchers observed that the Americans failed to connect with their interviewees and interlocutors and asked overly redundant questions just to continue with the script. Likewise, the host country researchers were often reported to oversimplify their questioning and note taking to the point that the information collected was incomplete. A host country researcher summarized this discrepancy:

The [host country] students summarized the questions, which allowed the respondents to express themselves freely. The Americans asked all the questions, thus making the interview lengthy. But I noticed it is due to the language barrier and accents of the language in
which the [host country researchers] had the upper hand [sic].

Indeed, the language of communication was an issue. However, as it was imparted during the training, following the script was needed to ensure that all the needed information was recorded, and could be analyzed. Simplifying the questions in interviewing is acceptable practice, as long as the needed information is captured; however, oversimplification of protocols that leads to data that partially answers evaluation questions is not productive. Likewise, mechanical adherence to scripts without being attentive to the interlocutors is also unproductive.

To compensate for the linguistic limitations and intercultural shortcomings of the Americans and the disregard for the script by the host country researchers, some team leaders opted for task specialization between host country researchers and Americans. For instance, only one interviewer or one observer was selected in the team, and the other team members would alternate as transcribers and interpreters. One researcher described the arrangement:

In my group, the duties of collecting the information were divided such that we each performed the same duties at each of the sites. The same person was assigned to stay with the children while we interviewed the teacher. The same person interviewed all of the parents, etc. In this way, we each became “experts” in performing our assignments and were able to gather the data in an expedient manner. Everyone took notes on their portion of the data collection.

I assigned the duties hours before we were to have our first meeting. After meeting with my team, the [host country] members of my team asked me to think about the language barrier that might occur even though the [host country] teachers and parents spoke English. Therefore, in collaborating with my team, assignments were changed. One of the [host country] members was assigned to interview all of the parents. The other [host country] member who recorded the number of project
books and materials that were being used was given
time to perform that duty so that he could assist the
U.S. person who was assigned to interview the teachers.

Data gathering would have been extremely difficult if
not impossible (especially with the parents) had there not
been [host country] members of the team. There were
many times when the [host country] partner needed to
translate the English language in the native tongue of
the interviewee or reword the sentence to make it easier
to understand in interviewing the teachers.

Whether or not these arrangements responded to the aspira-
tion of each researcher and research intern to be conversant about
all aspects of the evaluation process is an assessment beyond the
scope of this article. However, such arrangements made it possible
for team leaders to establish consistency and thus avert dissension
among team members on intercultural lines.

The issue of a shared performance system also calls for a funda-
mental question of intercultural researchers’ hidden agenda. When
asked to share what they expected from the 2 months in the host
country, one American researcher commented,

I expected to do research as it was shared with the team
of our assignments with [school materials project]. I
was not sure what to expect with the country, yet I was
excited and had very little fear about the trip. My major
challenge was culture/language barriers. I appreciated
the [host country] students being there because we were
able to learn from each other. The highlight of my trip
were the wonderful people and all the experiences we
shared together, i.e., the slave castle, the schools, shop-
ning together, the excursions, etc.

Other American researchers almost exclusively seemed to have
drawn their satisfaction from benefits of the trip other than the
program evaluation itself. The camaraderie within groups, the
“being there,” and overcoming those first apprehensions about
working with people from another culture seemed to have been
the ultimate goal. Researchers made comments as they evaluated
their epiphanies experienced on the project well ahead of the evalu-
aton itself. For example:
[I] visited [the] slave castle again. It had more of an impact because I was with American students. (Host country participant)

[I was] eager to show American students my university. (Host country participant)

We traveled through harsh terrain for days, but it was worth it. (U.S. participant)

Wanting the strong bond between U.S. and [host country] to last. (Host country participant)

[Thanks to this project], I want to work with the US Embassy or NGO (USA) on behalf of the women and children of my country. (Host country participant)

Having and using polite manners are very important. (U.S. participant)

**Navigating the Institutional Bureaucracy Maze**

Conducting a cross-cultural, cross-border program evaluation is a complex undertaking in both planning and execution. In the case of the evaluation at hand, the planning process was slow; nonetheless, by the time the host country ministry of education allowed the activities to proceed, and the university’s institutional review board approved the methodology, all parties involved were in agreement about the need for the evaluation and the logistics it required. However, the good intentions of the parties could not overcome some realities of governance of international projects.

First, the lead researcher observed that individuals who participated in the planning and design of the program evaluation in the host country were not the ones who joined the evaluation teams or the training sessions. During the preassessment sessions, a group of researchers were selected to review the methodology of the evaluation, including developing field research instruments, mapping field sites, and finalizing access to the field scripts. When the two groups of researchers met for the training in June 2010, there were subsequent changes. All the researchers from the host
team were replaced by other individuals who, although equally skilled researchers, nonetheless required familiarization with all the procedures from the very beginning. Even the field maps had to be redrawn. At least one key researcher who was to lead one of the field teams participated in the training but was unavailable for the rest of the activities.

Second, because of the shuffles in personnel, most teams, although they had at least one representative who understood the culture of the field sites, did not have the expertise and familiarity with the evaluation procedures that the initial planners would have brought. As a consequence, some teams resorted to drivers as guides and interpreters. Although the drivers’ services were invaluable, they were nonetheless unfamiliar with the scripting of the procedures and were not included among the lists of investigators submitted to the institutional review board (IRB).

Third, to support expanding the mission of the project, students were added to the evaluation teams as research trainees. However, because not all team leaders had mentored research trainees in the past, it was not possible to maintain a consistent level of facilitation of team reflections held each evening after fieldwork. Notes from team leaders indicated that as days passed and the volume of data collected increased, some team leaders became more concerned about data storage, data transcription, and redrawing data collection maps than requiring team members to enter field observations and reflections as initially planned. Team leaders also noted that not all trainees had enough background in education to be effective in observing classes and in interviewing teachers and parents. This lack of skills made the work of the lead researcher and team leaders more demanding. Particularly during the middle days, when the excitement of working with the “other culture” had subsided, the main concern of the lead researcher and team leaders was to balance two sets of competing needs: on the one hand, mentoring team members and maintaining harmony among them; on the other, ensuring completion of work assignments and tending to trainees’ development needs.

Fourth, and most important, access to the field for performing interviews and observation relied heavily on executing scripts consistently. Team leaders noted that although the scripts were clear and were approved by both the IRB and the host country’s officials, the evaluation coordinator and team leaders had to exercise an unexpected amount of flexibility to seek permission to reach the schools and participants. Often, administrators who were initially contacted for field access had been replaced in their positions.
Consequently, communication with the new officials had to be transmitted through the project’s in-country office staff. As is customary, all written communication had to bear an official stamp. These new replacements, as reliable as they were, did not participate in the orientation training. When the survey questionnaires and announcements of interviews and class observations reached the parents, teachers, and other participants, they may have been interpreted as administrative obligations as opposed to an invitation to voluntary participation. Furthermore, the teams had no way of ascertaining whether the language used in subsequent interoffice communications adhered to the language level required of the scripts or conveyed the purpose of the evaluation activities about which the initial group of administrators had been briefed.

Finally, team leaders noted that this grant-funded project was implemented as part of a broader national development agenda and that other nationally and internationally-funded projects with similar, supplemental, or complementary objectives were implemented at the same time. However, only officials at the national level seemed to know of the parallel initiatives. The researchers, as well as the end users of produced materials, were not fully informed of the broader policies. In the case of this evaluation, a complementary initiative funded by another agency had started distributing a set of teaching and learning materials to the same schools targeted. In some instances, the end users were not aware of the difference between the two sets. In others, the materials which were to be evaluated had not been distributed and were still stored in a container while the other set was used. In those situations, some teams of researchers were able to explain the differences; others opted to report the discrepancy only. In either case, the confusion distracted the evaluators.

**Discussion**

The stories and reflections reported above highlight several issues. The first challenge seems to be both with the selection of study abroad students and with the approval process for international research projects. On one hand, spending an academic period in another country, no matter how short or long, is an adventure for researchers and students, and the selection of the country or program may not always be guided by academic criteria alone. Some choose a country because relatives or former students from their majors have gone there before. Others choose a country for adventure or because of the flexibility of their academic assignments. In most of the programs to which this U.S. university sent students—
Europe, several countries in Africa, Mexico, Taiwan—participants engaged in academic and intercultural seminars combined with excursions. However, for the project at hand, a program evaluation component involving classroom observations and interviews of parents and educational professionals was added. Although the work included an academic component in the form of shadowing researchers, it turned out to be more technical and labor intensive than activities conducted in other programs, at least for researchers and students who were expecting some vacation abroad. Indeed, compared to tens of students going to other parts of the world in 2010, only six students selected this project. Because of the small pool of applicants, all six students were accepted to the program. The six students received an orientation to the program, but there was no further screening based on their research and program evaluation backgrounds or intercultural competence.

On the other hand, the approval process for international research is complex. The IRB generally will not approve research procedures until the host country has approved them. However, some host countries may not have a formal process for approving international projects. Thus, in the case of the evaluation project at hand, the final approval was obtained only 2 weeks before the group was to travel overseas. As a consequence of receiving the approval in mid-May with departure in the first week of June, the student interns barely had time to mentally prepare themselves for participating in evaluation activities. In contrast, study abroad students normally prepare for their experience through at least semester-long seminars and several weeks of in-country intercultural excursions.

Adhering to agreed-upon interviewing, observing, and data recording techniques seemed to work during the first days. The training the researchers had received throughout the orientation weeks appeared to work. All team leaders reported that their researchers were conforming to the scripts and that reflection times were very effective in correcting errors made. However, as days passed, members became more complacent. Interns were no longer writing as much in their pads, and some team members found the necessary scripts cumbersome; one member from the host country stopped following the scripts altogether. The researcher criticized the Americans for following the prescribed conventions of interviewing, such as using silence to let the interviewee elaborate, repeating what the interviewee said (i.e., “echoing”), and letting the interviewee talk. The researcher thought those techniques made the interviews too lengthy and reflected the Americans’ limited
communication skills in the host culture. Unfortunately, as a result of interviewers not following the protocols, particularly prodding for responses, sometimes whole interview sessions were sketched in one-word answers that could not be used in the reports.

Similarly, American student interns sometimes failed to read the context. They would make the interviewees uncomfortable by prodding them to expand on their responses when that was not needed, or they awkwardly used silence when that was not appropriate. Such experiences may have inspired pressure from their counterparts and awareness of their foreignness, which in turn caused the American student interns to abbreviate the interviews or the notes from interviews. In the last days of the evaluation, interview transcripts from both groups became incomprehensible, which made writing the final report extremely difficult.

The 3-week training in research procedures was very helpful. However, this training alone did not enable team members to sustain a uniform level of accountability. The teams that produced quality work apparently adhered to three basic principles. First, team leaders reinforced the techniques of program evaluation, particularly those related to interviewing and observing. During debriefing sessions, leaders had members discuss how they allowed participants to speak, echoed what they heard, and transcribed what they heard and saw, as opposed to jumping to interpretations. Second, team members were professional. They accepted and respected other team members. They did not overreact to criticism, and they ensured that their demeanor, attire, and speech—both during fieldwork and after work—were professional. Of particular importance was use of proper academic language; conflicts often arose when host country researchers perceived visitors’ English-language slang as uneducated mistakes. Third, team leaders who were effective were those who took the time to continuously reinforce research procedures because, as one team leader reflected, “one can only change or forego a technique if s/he fully understands it.”

Teams whose members truly viewed the evaluation as a cooperative activity to enhance understanding between the American people and the citizens of the host country seemed to do well. Those team members were, first and foremost, self-aware. In their intercultural conversations, they did not delve into stereotypes. They had the courage to acknowledge that their knowledge of their own country was limited. The cultural questions they asked their counterparts were genuine.
However, as these field stories highlighted, the teams sometimes needed more support from their campuses. At times, team leaders faced logistical, technical/training, or political issues that involved resources or skills that were not available while traversing the host country. More important, there were times when, several weeks into the project, team leaders started doubting what results the work would yield for them when they returned to their campuses. Would the extra mile put into improvised mentoring have a place in their portfolios, or count toward their promotion and tenure?

**Recommendations**

Intercultural collaboration on the evaluation of an international, grant-funded project involves several parties of stakeholders. The U.S. university and the country where the project was implemented, as the beneficiaries of the grant, and the funding agency, as the main sponsor of the grant, had signed a cooperative agreement guiding operations. Consequently, all three parties were responsible for executing the project from design to evaluation. Both the university and the officials at the ministry of education in the host country were responsible for the evaluation of the project. With approval from the funding agency, they proposed forming a cross-cultural team representing the two parties. To add to the capacity building of the project, lead researchers were asked to mentor student interns in the activities. Based on the teams’ experiences, we offer a number of suggestions for involvement in similar intercultural collaborative activities. We propose that more thorough and appropriate preparation, as outlined in the following sections, could have made the experience more reliably worthwhile for researchers and contributed more to meeting the expectations of the communities involved.

**Recommendations for Collaborative Research Coordinators**

Coordinators of intercultural collaborative projects involving program evaluation and other engagement activities need to realize that not everybody is a program evaluator, much less an intercultural research collaborator. It is easy to romanticize a trip to another part of the world or hosting guests from other cultures. However, when the trip or the hosting involves an activity as labor intensive and as standard guided as program evaluation, that intrinsic motivation can be short lived. One must not only be ready to embark
on the journey, but also possess the stamina and the skills to stay the course. That is why it is recommended that researchers be carefully selected for their motivation and skills. In particular, student researchers should not just go abroad or be called to work on an international project without an assessment of their character and predisposition to intercultural activity. Therefore, the authors recommend that only researchers who are self-aware, open to other cultures, and true to the “people-to-people” mission of the project should be selected to conduct an international, collaborative program evaluation. Further, researchers should be team leaders only if they know the project from the inside and are informed about the political and social context of the project.

Second, a one-semester course of orientation to study abroad cannot by itself guarantee that students will be ready to function abroad. Such courses are often too generic. For example, this project would have benefited from a more structured, deeper, and longer orientation program once in the host country. Moreover, orientation courses seem to target students only. Faculty and staff also need an orientation. Crash orientation sessions that are organized at the beginning of activities can be cumbersome, particularly if they focus on the logistics of the work, rather than the evaluation skills and awareness. That is why it is recommended that teams be balanced in technical and interpersonal skills as well as in the knowledge of the terrain. Because the evaluation procedures required the teams to crisscross the host country, some teams had more skills than others, which affected the availability of lead evaluators to mentor interns and to consistently monitor field activities. Furthermore, orientation in the evaluation methodology can never be long enough. The 3 weeks that the visiting group spent receiving the training and the 1 week of combined training of the two groups were not enough to ensure that all evaluators, particularly research interns, became interculturally competent and able to fully adhere to all evaluation standards—utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability (Yarbrough et al., 2011).

Third, even a good and fun adventure can be structured. It only took 2 weeks for some groups in this project to become complacent about their mandatory morning briefing and evening debriefing sessions. Team leaders also became more lenient about completion of journal notes and reflections before bedtime, as well as evening calling-in to the research coordinator. Those activities ought to be the fabric of the collaborative experience. Only when team leaders continuously reinforce procedures and facilitate reflections will team members be able to function in a cross-cultural
collaborative program evaluation. Team members must at all times adhere to the procedures and to the highest professional standards. Doing so requires, in turn, that team leaders be well organized and knowledgeable about the whole picture. They also should ensure that negative attitudes, which often result from a combination of tolerating stereotypes, ignorance, and fatigue, do not contaminate the team spirit. For that, team leaders must set boundaries about the types of teasing, jokes, and attitudes to allow.

Fourth, a common purpose must serve both as a reminder to look beyond the immediate and a window to opportunities. Once in the field, it is easy to forget why one is there. Data collection, analysis, and logistical arrangements soon take precedence over the diplomatic and humanitarian purpose of the experience. Very soon, crisscrossing the host country and writing reports become the goal; establishing a shared performance system for the evaluation becomes neglected. It was easy for members of one group to view the significance of the project through their exclusive lenses. As days passed and routines were established, it became difficult for teams to retain a rigorous focus on their mission. Team leaders became preoccupied with ensuring that there were no omissions in the transcriptions or storage of data collected, that the logistics were coordinated within and among teams, and that there was harmony among group members. Consequently, teams devoted less time to reflecting together and writing about the meaning of their experiences. We recommend that team leaders adopt a methodology for continuously maintaining a focus on the common purpose of the evaluation, make it a priority, and never stop instilling in researchers what the evaluation means for the communities involved. In particular, before embarking on an intercultural collaborative project, research coordinators and researchers ought to receive structured training in techniques for gaining and maintaining trust of key stakeholders in the collaborative country.

Recommendations for Selecting and Training Student Researchers, Faculty, and Auxiliary Staff

As discussed above, the selection of student researchers from the U.S. university and matching them with student researchers from the host country was an activity approved and added at the last minute. The student researchers had already signed up for the summer project in the host country and were already attending an intercultural orientation course targeting the host country, but with the understanding that they would do the usual teacher aide work. Once the activity was added, the students received several sessions
of training tailored to technical and ethics issues in program evaluation and design, field access, and intercultural communication. Omitted, however, was another round of one-on-one interviews with the research team to ensure that the students were fully ready for the challenge. Such a screening would have resulted in some students being dropped from the program, replaced on the project, or given more preparation.

However, in retrospect, our experience shows that such last-minute provisions would not have been enough. Students, faculty, and staff who participate in intercultural collaborative activities need to receive preparation that reflects the realities of such work. Students need coursework in effective communication and engagement activities as well as experience in program evaluation and design, such areas as international and intercultural awareness. Similarly, the faculty and staff performing their first international project evaluation should not be assigned to an international, intercultural collaborative activity. Such projects are appropriate only for faculty and staff skilled and trained in ethical issues of program evaluation and experienced in program evaluation design and field access.

Auxiliary staff such as drivers and office staff need to be more effectively inducted into activities. Project coordinators ought to make drivers part of the teams from the start. Training sessions can be used for sharing drivers’ knowledge of the terrain and for familiarizing the drivers with the researchers. At a minimum, the drivers ought to be consistently informed, together with the researchers, about the design of the project, ethical issues in collecting the data, and communicating with the stakeholders. The same ought to be true for office staff who interact with stakeholders and researchers. In this project, office staff were privy to conversations among researchers and drivers, whether directly or indirectly, and were responsible for communication between researchers and stakeholders. Leaving them unaware of ethical issues involved in such critical activities as contacting stakeholders, contacting interviewees, and managing project resources could jeopardize the entire evaluation.

Finally, at the conclusion of the project, a better coordination of efforts is needed for assessment of student researchers’ experiences, as well as faculty and staff’s experiences. Students’ grades for their summer internships should be awarded based on recommendations from their team leaders. Similarly, a more consistent structure for assessing the roles of faculty, drivers, and auxiliary staff, on both the U.S. side and the host country’s side, needs to be
carefully created to ensure that the efforts of these individuals are included in participating institutions’ accomplishments.

**Recommendation for Involving Student Researchers and Auxiliary Staff**

For both hosts and visiting teams, navigating the complexities of internationally-funded grant projects can become an added learning task. As this project exemplified, cooperative agreements are sometimes fluid. Whether in response to broader national goals and changing political environments or for diplomatic reasons, projects often request funding for supplementary activities that can divert researchers’ attention from their primary focus. The addition of students as research interns from the American and African sides, although a very diplomatic gesture, called for the team leaders to exercise mentorship skills that they may not have had. At the least, the addition stretched the focus and expertise of the team leaders. If this responsibility had been anticipated from the start, only research team leaders with a background of working with and mentoring research/teaching assistants would have been selected for the project. Therefore, we recommend that institutions establish within their international outreach centers (and establish such a center, if the university does not have one) a structure for training faculty in intercultural research mentoring.

Similarly, the drivers, although indispensable in their roles as interpreters and tour guides, required some added savoir-faire from researchers. This situation was exacerbated by the drivers’ not having participated in the research teams’ orientation sessions. Therefore, we recommend that team leaders be versed, in addition to research and intercultural competence, in cooperation rules. They must also be fully informed and prepared to work in the international context and prepared for a variety of exigencies. For example, host country researchers may unexpectedly depart collaborative activities due to the demands of their employment. Team leaders must have the training, technical skills, and networking capability to complete the collaboration with sometimes unpredictable resources.

**Recommendation for Participating Institutions: Creating a Comprehensive Center for Global Outreach and Engagement Initiatives**

Professionals involved in global outreach and engagement activities, such as those described in this report, may perform their
role thousands of miles away from campus. Even when hosting activities in their own countries, intercultural collaboration can take professionals out of their comfort zone. Because of the sensitive nature of international collaborative activities whose success depends on many factors and many stakeholders, ensuring that activity designs are effectively implemented requires a thought-through system of support. A higher education institution’s global outreach and engagement center may give involved stakeholders enough structure and resources to not only plan ahead, but also face unexpected challenges by providing the following eight functions: academic programming; integrated intercultural competence and awareness; study abroad; international grants and research; faculty development and support; logistics, technology, and business operations; communication and dissemination; and linkages with international universities and organizations (see Figure 1).

First and foremost, effective initiatives for global outreach and engagement need to rely on strong academic programming that develops collaborative courses, establishes dual degrees with international universities and institutions, and plans faculty and staff exchanges. Parallel to academic programming must be plans...
to infuse integrated intercultural competence and awareness into academic and social programs. This way, students, faculty, and staff who participate in global outreach and engagement would draw from an established culture of globalization.

The study abroad and support unit would be charged with developing courses for all students conducting short- and long-term programs abroad, including summer programs and internships. The unit will also create and schedule orientation courses and screening procedures for students who go abroad, as well as mechanisms for placing students and assessing their experiences. This unit will also be responsible for coordinating with faculty and academic programs in assessing the academic and cultural experiences of students who complete study abroad programs. Adjustments to country placements, cultural experiences, logistics, and pairing of students with faculty would be proposed by this unit as well.

The international grants and research unit will be responsible for coordinating and monitoring global initiatives including assessment and support. The faculty development and support unit will provide continuous development and support to faculty involved in global initiatives. The logistics, technology, and business operations unit will ensure efficiency of center operations. Newsletters, websites, and other promotional services will be sustained through the communication and dissemination unit. This unit will also coordinate discussions among researchers about disseminating their findings and experiences through scholarly publications and presentations. Most of all, this unit will ensure that the correct protocols for disseminating grant-funded work are consistently and properly followed. Finally, the center will continue to initiate and expand partnerships with international universities and organizations. Full development of the concepts outlined here will support increasing thoroughness and professionalism of outreach and engagement initiatives.

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References


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PROJECTS WITH PROMISE
Abstract

This study examined whether teaching in a community arts organization that provides services for people with developmental disabilities enabled preservice art teachers to better understand diverse contexts of art programs and the benefits of teaching the arts to others. Through this activity, the author also examined whether preservice art teachers became more civic-minded individuals. Preservice art teachers applied course concepts in a community setting by teaching art lessons to people with disabilities. Pretest and posttest questionnaires, students’ reflections, and observation were used to study changes in preservice art teachers’ perceptions by considering variables and indicators from a model proposed by Amy Driscoll et al. (1998) to assess students involved in service-learning. Preservice art teachers showed a reduction in anxiety around this community, leadership development, strong relationship building, and a change in perceptions about community engagement and outreach. However, results revealed shortcomings in realizing concern for social justice implicit in the goals of this study.

Introduction

Many art educators are committed to social justice, whether in the K-12 classroom, higher education, nonprofit arts organizations, museums, or state/federal arts policy organizations. According to Cipolle (2010), adults committed to social justice have common characteristics such as family values, educational environment, and comparable service experiences. Cipolle (2010) explained that early experiences for an individual are the “key ingredients that contribute to forming an action identity committed to justice” (p. 28).

Personally, I can trace my own interest in social justice issues to high school, when I was given the opportunity to participate in a leadership academy program that encouraged high school students to connect with the community. I remember working on Saturdays organizing and preparing boxes of food for delivery at a local food pantry. In my case, community experience planted the seed for my continued interest in social justice issues.
My high school experience guided me into service as an undergraduate student, and then on to joining the Peace Corps and participating in service throughout graduate school. During the years I spent teaching as a graduate teaching assistant and a visiting assistant professor, I provided similar opportunities to my undergraduate students. These opportunities would be considered community service or “light” service-learning. The distinction is that service-learning has an explicit connection to teaching and learning that community service lacks (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). I had yet to fully appreciate the extent of the connections that could be made through service-learning. Exploring service-learning as a vehicle for research had not crossed my mind. Not until I became an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) in the Dallas–Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex was I introduced to a more prescribed form of service-learning and its implications for research.

The Beginning: Context and Community Need

As a faculty member, I was selected to be a University Service-Learning Fellow with the Center for Community Service-Learning (CCSL) for the 2012–2013 academic year. The fellowship consisted of participation in monthly seminars with other faculty fellows; learning from readings about service-learning; writing reflections; listening to guest speakers who had conducted successful service-learning projects; discussing service-learning possibilities, relationships, teaching, and research with other faculty across the university; and developing and writing service-learning plans. Faculty fellows were to embrace the mission of the UTA CCSL, which was to enhance learning and civic responsibility through community engagement.

Throughout the Fall 2012 semester, I was dedicated to learning about and planning a service-learning course. I used the Spring 2013 semester to implement my first service-learning course, Applying and Teaching Art Curricula. The preservice art teachers in this course worked with a nonprofit organization called Evergreen Life Services, which provides services for people with developmental disabilities. Evergreen serves, provides for, and champions individuals with disabilities in five ways:

1. The organization’s members are committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in their home communities.
2. They have a basic belief in and assurance to advocacy for human and civil rights.

3. They are dedicated to the highest possible quality of life for disabled individuals.

4. They are devoted to encouraging the spiritual growth and nurturance of all people.

5. They maintain a long-term commitment to provide for people with disabilities by maintaining a stable, viable, principled, and financially healthy organization.

In 2012, Evergreen reached out to local universities in the DFW area looking for faculty in the arts who could provide student partnerships for a new program called the Cultural Arts and Production Center (CAPC). I was aware of and had volunteered for similar programs when I was in graduate school, and I knew the potential benefits to people with developmental disabilities. The program’s mission was “dynamic curriculum that include[d] art, music, theater, ceramics, and production in an environment that fosters creativity and inspires self-reliance for those with developmental disabilities” (Evergreen Life Services, 2015, para. 2). The idea was to incorporate the arts into the everyday experiences of clients whom Evergreen serves, hoping that clients would not only be able to sell their artwork for profit, but also to use art for self-expression as a therapeutic coping mechanism for emotional highs and lows.

My faculty fellowship and the contact by Evergreen seemed a perfect match. As an art educator, I wanted to provide and encourage my students to build relationships with the community as I had when I was young. Incorporating service-learning with my undergraduate course would enrich and engage preservice art teachers and meet a community need; furthermore, it would provide an opportunity to conduct a pilot research study. My research objective for this study was to explore how preservice art teachers teaching in a community arts organization with people who have developmental disabilities could better understand socially and culturally diverse contexts of art programs and the benefits of teaching the arts to others. I was also curious to learn how these preservice art teachers could become more civic-minded individuals.

The goal of this research was to examine whether or not students could apply and test course concepts from Developing and Constructing Art Curricula (the Fall 2012 prerequisite course) in the Spring 2013 course, Applying and Teaching Art Curricula, which would include service-learning. The two courses constituted
a curricular sequence in which the first was a prerequisite for the second. In Developing and Constructing Art Curricula, students learned strategies, theories, methods, philosophies, and assessments employed in the teaching of art. In the subsequent service-learning course, Applying and Teaching Art Curricula, they were able to apply and test the ideas and concepts learned in the first. This research is important for preservice art teachers because in most schools, art teachers will encounter disabled youth in their classrooms; the information presented here has the potential to enhance art teaching skills and to promote a better understanding of adults and children with developmental disabilities.

**Service-Learning and Art Education**

To understand service-learning’s roots, one must look to Dewey’s (1938) ideas about experiential education and Freire’s (1993) action-oriented, critical consciousness. Dewey, influenced by a profound belief in democracy, considered two fundamental elements—schools and civil society—to be major topics needing attention. He argued for a quality education where people would learn through experience, experimentation, purposeful learning, and freedom. Freire believed education to be a political act that could not be divorced from pedagogy. Both theorists advocated education as a mechanism for social change and laid the foundation for what is today called service-learning (Deans, 1999). Service-learning is similar to and has the same theoretical background as action research, participatory research, popular education, empowerment research, participatory action research, community-based research, and others (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003).

The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 defined service-learning as a method under which participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community. Strand et al. (2003) saw the bases of the method in collaboration, democratization of knowledge, and social change and justice. Cipolle (2010) perceived service-learning and social change in the context of enhanced awareness and critical consciousness, referring to deepening the awareness of self, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of others, developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of social issues, and seeing one’s potential to make changes in society.
For some time, art educators have explored community-based art education (Bastos, 2002; Ulbricht, 2005), community-based art and community art (Adejumo, 2000; Bastos & Hutzel, 2004; Congdon, 2004; Hutzel & Cerulean, 2003), service-learning and the arts (Buffington, 2007; Hutzel, 2007; Hutzel, Russell, & Gross, 2010; Krensky & Steffen, 2008; Russell & Hutzel, 2007; Taylor, 2002, 2004), and art gallery spaces and teacher preparation in the context of service-learning (Innella, 2010; Milbrant, 2006). Community-based art education approaches share a number of traits with service-learning: collaboration, democratization of knowledge, and social change and justice (Strand et al., 2003). Viewed through the theories of Dewey, Freire, and others, engaging students in an art education curriculum or art-based project contextualized by service-learning can have the beneficial effect of supporting their development in various positive learning outcomes across the full spectrum of art content, pedagogy, civil society, and social justice.

The National Youth Leadership Council developed service-learning standards for quality practice. When these standards are linked to the arts, one can better connect art education and service-learning. Brown and Leavitt (2009) provided a list of arts-based service-learning (ABSL) standards:

1. “ABSL has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs, in-depth exploration and experiential learning in the arts, and specified outcomes.”

2. ABSL actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant arts and service activities.

3. ABSL provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating arts-based experiences with guidance from teachers, teaching artists, and community members.

4. ABSL promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

5. ABSL partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs through the arts.
6. ABSL incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself, one's relationship to society, one's relationship to the arts, and the role of the arts in society.

7. ABSL engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability” (p. 12).

The goals for service-learning and art education complement each other in ways that make students stronger not only in understanding the arts but also in backing their communities.

**Connecting Art Making to Service-Learning**

Using the Driscoll et al. (1998) model of student variables and indicators to assess student changes and perceptions while involved in service-learning, measurement tools were developed to capture the existence of an indicator or measure changes in an indicator. Table 1 displays the variables and indicators for measuring student impact in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of community</td>
<td>Knowledge of community history, strengths, problems, definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement with community</td>
<td>Quantity/quality of interactions, attitude toward involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to service</td>
<td>Plans for future service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career choice</td>
<td>Influence of community placement job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Changes in awareness of strengths, limits, direction, role, goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Participation in additional courses, extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>Role of community, experience in understanding and applying content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to diversity</td>
<td>Attitude, understanding of diversity, comfort and confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy/independence</td>
<td>Learner role</td>
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<td>Sense of ownership</td>
<td>Learner role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Class interactions, community interactions</td>
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Three methods were employed to measure impact: pretest/posttest questionnaires, student reflections, and observation. The pretest/posttest questionnaires revolved around the variables listed in Table 1. Reflection was used to gather qualitative data in the form of testimonials (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Reflection is an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supported form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it” (Dewey, 1933, p. 146). Experience becomes educative when critical reflective thought creates new meaning and leads to growth and the ability to take informed actions (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Reflection prompts were provided based on the widely-used framework: What? So what? Now what? This framework was based on David Kolb’s (1984) “concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation” (p. 41) analytic phases of the reflective process. The first question prompted students to describe their experiences during arts-based service-learning events. To answer the second question, students examined and interpreted their descriptions in terms of their personal development. For the third question, students contemplated the impact of the experience to insights and connections with the future of their teaching and civic engagement. Students turned in one-page reflection responses in the form of printed hard copies or by e-mail. Observations and photographs of students were recorded while the students participated in arts-based service-learning events during class.

**Preparation**

During the first few weeks of the Spring 2013 semester, students in Applying and Teaching Art Curricula read about art therapy, developmental disability, and service-learning, and they engaged in class discussions. This armed students with an understanding of the people with whom they would work and with the concepts on which service-learning is based.

To improve rapport and augment relationships, the class was split into three groups. These three groups worked with a set of three groups of people at the CAPC for three art-making sessions, each of which was 3 hours in duration. With this structure, it was possible for students to plan one art unit with three lessons, using one lesson for each of the art-making sessions. In groups, the students chose an overall theme or big idea for the unit and developed three lessons that corresponded to that big idea. Used in art education for unit and lesson planning, big ideas are themes that reflect big questions about the human experience (Stewart & Walker,
Students planned, developed, applied, and taught their units. Students had learned the process for planning a unit and its lessons during the fall course. As part of the planning process, I instructed students to use the art therapy literature to initiate ideas and to prepare their unit’s lessons based on the needs of the developmentally disabled participants. While planning and developing these lessons, they prepared prototypes to test methods and strategies, working through kinks and thinking about how challenging the making of art might be for someone with developmental disabilities.

**Art-Making Sessions**

Overall, the service-learning project consisted of three art-making sessions with roughly 36 developmentally disabled adults and 18 students over a period of one semester. Students worked in groups of six teaching art to 12 participants. To distinguish between the subjects in the research, student participants will be called “students,” and the CAPC participants will be called “participants” throughout this article. Additionally, I required students to volunteer at the CAPC for 10 hours outside of class to support stronger relationship building and understanding of this population. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was received before the semester and research began.

**Session 1.** Each of the three groups of students planned and tested their art unit and lessons for Sessions 1 through 3 before teaching them to participants. Working from the art therapy literature, Group 1 chose the unit theme music and worked with both fluid and resistive materials. Landgarten (1987) positioned materials along a continuum, using the terms least controlled and more controlled. Materials that have more structure (like collage or wood assemblage) or more solidity (like pencils or firm clay) are described as resistive or more controlled. Materials that have less structure, that flow easily, or that can be manipulated more freely are described as being fluid or less controlled (Hinz, 2009; Lusebrink, 1990).

For Session 1, Group 1 prepared a lesson based on fluid materials working in 2D with watercolor paints, glue, and salt. They introduced a variety of music as inspiration and to evoke emotion for participants’ art making. Each participant was able to experiment with the watercolors and see how the glue and salt interacted with the paint.

Group 2 decided on the unit theme of emotions. Although art therapists share a consensus that fluid materials elicit more
emotional responses than resistive ones, research to confirm such observations definitively is lacking (Malchiodi, 2012). “Emotional or cognitive content is dependent on other aspects of the creative process including the specific process introduced and clients’ personal preferences for using art for self-expression” (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 29).

During this first session, Group 2’s project was splatter painting. Group members prepared two pieces of paper adhered to cardboard as a diptych and provided different cups or bottles filled with watered-down paint. The focus of their art-making project was to elicit two emotions and work with the participants to express these emotions by splattering color.

Group 3 decided on a unit theme of expression through color and collage. “Images and image formation, whether mental images or those drawn on paper, are important in all art therapy practice because through art making participants are invited to reframe how they feel, respond to an event or experience, and work on emotional and behavioral change” (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 18). Group 3’s art-making lesson allowed participants to actively try out, experiment with, respond to, and rehearse a desired emotional and/or behavioral change, event, or experience through collage, which involved a tangible object that was physically altered.

Since Session 1 took place shortly before Valentine’s Day, Group 3 based the first lesson on the creation of Valentine boxes and cards made with the collage technique. They provided shoeboxes, a variety of colored paper, scrapbooking stickers, and glue sticks. They began by teaching the history of Valentine’s Day and discussing color and collage. Participants were pleased with being able to make the Valentine’s Day cards and then give them to one another and family members. They were proud of their accomplishment and showed off their boxes to everyone in the facility.

**Session 2.** Group 1’s lesson for the second session was a mix of both fluid and resistive materials in 2D form. They began by using colored pencils and markers, and then participants used melted crayons to add wax to their artwork. Again, the idea was for participants to be inspired by a mix of music that was playing while they created art.

Group 2’s lesson for the second session was called the Tree Bark Project. The group taught color theory and had color theory charts at each table for participants’ reference. The lesson was designed to guide participants to make art using colors based on their mood. Participants could use watercolors to paint their paper with any
color based on their mood; then they designed, drew, and cut out
trees that were adhered to the painted piece of paper.

Group 3’s lesson was another color and collage project but this
time, participants wrote their names on transparent paper that
adhered to a window or glass pane. Participants used colored tissue
paper to collage their name so that when hung on a window, it gave
a stained-glass effect.

**Session 3.** For Session 3, students continued with their unit
themes and created different art lessons based on these themes.
Group 1 switched from fluid, 2D materials to resistive, 3D mate-
rials using clay. In Group 2’s project, participants drew their initials
over a painted background, outlined their initials with pins, then
wove string or yarn around the pins to create a web. Group 3 con-
tinued using color and collage but with more traditional media.
Participants created collages using images and text from magazines.

**Volunteering**

In order to build rapport and relationships with participants
at the CAPC, students spent 10 hours on volunteer contact outside
the course schedule. The three art-making sessions were intended
to facilitate interaction, help students test theoretical concepts
and strategies, and promote examples of teaching and learning.
However, “communities are well-developed, complex entities that
must be understood and accepted rather than required to adapt to
university culture” *(Kellett & Goldstein, 1999, p. 32)*. During the vol-
unteer time, therefore, students were to focus on building relation-
ships in order to better understand participants and the organiza-
tion and feel the “soul of the community” *(Lima, 2013, p. 88)*. It was
hoped that they would become deeply involved in the community
and that rather than finding the time boring, they would want to
repeat the experience outside class.

Initially, students were not enthusiastic about the 10 hours;
however, at the end of the semester, the outside-class hours resulted
in some of the best work. Without much direction, students col-
laborated on several projects. Certain students took leadership
positions to rally other students together to work on bigger, more
collaborative outcomes. The three main projects in which almost
all students participated were a quilt project, making paper bag
puppets, and a graffiti wall.

The graffiti wall surprised everyone who was involved. It was
a massive project that continued for weeks, and the CAPC leader-
ship as well as participants raved about the end result. The grafi-
fiti wall was initiated in the facility as a place where participants could openly paint to express emotions, share daily occurrences, or communicate whatever they were feeling. With the assistance of two other students, one student developed the initial concept, but the entire class participated in the project at least once. At first, the students did not believe that the CAPC leadership would allow them to paint on a wall in the facility. However, when the students discussed the idea with them, the leaders were excited about the concept. A group of students collaborated with participants to set up the wall by taping it off, writing rules and inspirational sayings at the top, painting the background with different colors, and initiating the graffiti. After this start, others joined in with their own artwork, text, and ideas. Throughout the semester, different groups of students used their volunteer hours to open the wall and paint with participants. The wall continuously morphed and changed over time.

With the many changes and people painting over the artwork of others, some had difficulty letting go of previously painted sections. One of the CAPC leaders commented many times that she felt sad when something was painted over. The students’ intention from the beginning, however, had been for the wall to change, morph, and evolve. The wall was based on the idea of letting go and not becoming attached to any one image or artwork. After some time, CAPC leaders and participants enjoyed the act of painting over past works and made many comments about liking the evolution of the wall (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The graffiti wall, students, and participants who worked together to create the artwork.
Reflections and Questionnaires

Students were required to complete four reflections, one for each art-making session and one for the 10 hours of volunteer time. These reflections offered much information about changes in perception, although the prompts were not directly about perception. All but one student indicated an increase in satisfaction with the service-learning project as time progressed throughout the semester. From the first reflection, which revolved around how fearful, anxious, and nervous students were at the outset, to the final reflection, which described not wanting to stop working at the CAPC, making great friendships, and enjoying the experience immensely, it became apparent that there was strong agreement about the value of the service-learning. Overall, the reflections indicated changes of perception regarding levels of personal anxiety, knowledge about people with developmental disabilities, leadership development, self-confidence, and relationship building. The following student reflection quotes are indicative of these perception changes:

“I was beyond nervous about working with special needs adults the first time we went there... Once we started spending time with the people there and getting to know them, it's hard to imagine there was ever anything to be afraid of in the first place. Nearly everyone I've met there seems to truly enjoy having the opportunity to create art and finding an outlet to express themselves. They're also just genuinely nice people who [are] always ready to give you a hug and ask how you're doing. I definitely plan on spending more time volunteering there in the future, because it's a fantastic way to help enrich the lives of others as well as your own.”

“As scared and nervous as I was at the beginning, the time I spent at the CAPC was refreshing, educational, and fun. The people there were amazing and having made friends with some of them made me feel special. The smiles on their faces when we walked in made me feel like a celebrity. The time I spent at the CAPC was a priceless learning and teaching experience. If I have the chance, I'd like to visit next semester as well and catch up with my new friends Nathan and Maria.”
“Service-learning is a humble experience, and every time we go we get to help our community. It is very rewarding seeing how much they appreciate us being there and having the opportunity working with them. I hope that I will be able to go back and work with them, as well as being able to collaborate with my classmates makes this experience better. I definitely do plan to keep helping out at the CAPC when given the chance, as well as to get more involved in my community.”

“This time has opened up my eyes to another world that I want to take more time to learn about and see what other ways that I can give my time. I have always wanted to do something with the mentally disabled but I don’t know if I would have ever had the courage to pursue this without having spent this time with the people at Evergreen.”

Most responses from the reflections were similar to these four short examples in illustrating an increased awareness about and better knowledge of the developmentally disabled community, expressing an interest in repeating the experience, and continuing to work with people through the arts. All students mentioned their progress in teaching art, understanding concepts, reworking ideas, reflecting and making their practice better throughout the semester, and learning how to better facilitate working with people with disabilities. The majority of responses suggested greater civic-mindedness after the service-learning experience. Many students wrote that they wanted to return, wanted to become more involved in their communities, and wanted the good feelings that came from teaching art in the CAPC community.

**Pretest/Posttest Questionnaires**

Pretest and posttest questionnaires were administered to the students at the beginning and end of the semester to examine changes in their perceptions regarding service-learning, the socially and culturally diverse contexts of art programs, the benefits of teaching the arts to others, and their civic-mindedness.

**Demographics.** There were 18 students in the course: 16 females and two males. Eight students were aged 18 to 22, six were aged 23 to 27, two were aged 28 to 32, and two were aged 33 to 42.
Ten students were Caucasian, seven were Hispanic, and one was Asian American.

**Pretest/Posttest Comparison.** After responding to general demographic questions, students provided responses to a set of questions (Questions 13–28) that were based on agreement levels about perception changes. The questions were drafted to produce responses regarding the students’ civic engagement, guided by Driscoll et al.’s (1998) model of student variables and indicators, and to address the overall research goals. The questions were the same for both the pretest and posttest questionnaires except that the latter did not require preassessment demographic information. The questionnaires used a Likert scale where 1= *strongly disagree*, 2= *disagree*, 3= *neutral*, 4= *agree*, and 5= *strongly agree*.

One of the questions on the pretest questionnaire inquired, “How would you describe your level of community service/volunteer involvement during the last 4 years?” The majority of students responded “sometimes” or “rarely” involved. One student responded as “very” involved, and three students said they were “never” involved. This question provided insight into the students’ amount of community service involvement before taking the course and provided a preassessment of students working in their communities before the project. This, however, did not indicate their level of service-learning experience because the question was inquiring about general community service. In class, most of the students acknowledged that if they were involved at all, it was through their church. Example questions in the form of statements with which students could agree or disagree included the following:

- I know that I can make a difference in the lives of others.
- I have a civic responsibility to become involved in my community.
- I am very likely to participate regularly in community service/volunteer activities in the future.
- I am likely to understand better my preconceived notions of diverse teaching settings (such as stereotypes).
- I will become aware of appropriate art teaching strategies (in diverse contexts) of community arts programs.
- I will very likely have a better understanding of how arts activities benefit others.
- I will very likely feel that I have made a difference for someone else.
- I will very likely become more civically minded and engaged.
- I will very likely better understand the value of the arts to others.

Using the 5-point Likert scale, corresponding numbers of the responses were averaged. Averaged responses were examined to better understand whether agreement levels would change from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester after completion of the arts-based service-learning project. These averages do not constitute the type of strong evidence produced by statistical analysis to better understand significance; however, this pilot study was performed with limited resources and time. Most agreement levels increased for the posttest, which indicated that students’ perceptions had changed positively (see Figure 2). However, for five questions of 15 total, average agreement levels remained the same, reflected decreased interest for the posttest, or interest levels barely increased indicating a small perception change or lessened interest or enthusiasm. Since these five questions were the outliers, where average agreement levels did not increase, a discussion is appropriate.

**Comparison between Pretest and Posttest**

![Comparison between Pretest and Posttest](image)

*Figure 2. Comparison of pretest and posttest questionnaires.*

Two questions probed students’ thoughts about their choice of major and their success in college. These were: “I am very certain of my choice for my undergraduate major” and “I am very confident of my ability to succeed in college.” The questions were intended to determine whether the service-learning experience might solidify
students’ choice of major and confidence in succeeding in school. The agreement levels increased slightly from pretest to posttest. This might mean that the experience did not influence students’ feelings about major and success with or without the service-learning experience. Statistical analysis of responses might indicate that there was no effect at all.

Two other questions showed no difference between the pretest and posttest responses. One said, “I will better understand diverse contexts (spaces and environments) while teaching art.” The other said, “I will become aware of appropriate art teaching strategies (in diverse contexts) of community arts programs.” Although overall agreement level was high, averaging 4.44 out of 5 for both questions, the responses did not change from the beginning of the semester to the end. A fifth said, “I will better understand art education course concepts and theories (those related to service-learning, art therapy, developmental disabilities, and teaching and learning).” Although overall the agreement levels were high, students’ average agreement level for this question decreased, averaging 4.5 pretest and 4.39 posttest.

Three of these questions were important indicators for the overall goal of this project, which was to ascertain whether students might consider service-learning an experience that facilitates understanding diverse contexts, awareness of appropriate teaching strategies, and understanding art education course concepts and theories. That these agreement levels remained the same or decreased was disappointing. Even though they did not increase from pretest to posttest, the agreement levels were in the high range, from 4 to 5. Agreement levels for all other questions (of questions 13 through 28) increased on the posttest questionnaire. There was only one question that elicited a decrease in agreement level out of 16 total questions. Although this question on the posttest resulted in a decreased agreement level in regard to a better understanding of course concepts and theories, it is difficult to fully understand why. Perhaps students’ experiences did not connect to course concepts and theories as hoped or perhaps, due to not using statistical analysis, a full picture of whether the responses were significant cannot be identified. The reflections suggest another outcome.

Figure 3 shows individual students’ overall average responses. All but four students’ level of agreement increased throughout the semester, and all students’ agreement levels were in the 4 to 5 range. This may indicate that the majority of students had a positive experience and thought that service-learning was valuable in their art
Engaging a Developmentally Disabled Community Through Arts-Based Service-Learning

This education course. This figure reflects that the majority of students’ perceptions changed positively throughout the experience.

![Average Student Responses for Questions 13-28](image)

**Figure 3.** Average agreement level for each student for questions 13–28.

**Arts-Based Service-Learning Project Outcomes and Implications**

The pretest and posttest questionnaires evolved from Driscoll et al.’s (1998) model of student variables and indicators to assess student changes from, perceptions of, and learning in a service-learning course. The questions were based on the 11 variables in Table 1. Responses to both the questionnaires and reflections can be examined using these variables and indicators. In addition, a large part of my understanding of students’ changes and perceptions was achieved through observing and examining the art-making sessions. The points below, which reflect a synthesis of outcomes from questionnaires, reflections, and observations of the art-making sessions, indicate increased civic-mindedness.

**Awareness of and Involvement With the Community**

Students showed an increase in awareness when working with the developmentally disabled population after coming to terms with their anxiety. They showed knowledge of the community’s history, gained a grasp of the participants’ strengths and weaknesses, and could better define a range of developmental disabilities. They connected to the population through teaching art, grasped “the soul” of the community, and learned about people whose experiences and backgrounds were different from theirs. Their interactions and attitudes toward this community were predominantly positive.
Commitment to Service

Commitment to service was best observed at the end of the semester, when the majority of students wanted to continue working at the facility teaching art after the semester ended. In the questionnaire, students indicated a more favorable awareness of long-term civic engagement, stating that they were more likely to participate regularly in community service/volunteer work in their communities after having participated in the service-learning project. A couple of students continued art-making workshops at the CAPC after the completion of the course.

Academic Achievement, Career Choice, and Development

Students were able to practice what they had learned in class by reflecting, refining, and (re)teaching the material. It was an invaluable experience for students to learn whether their units/lessons were appropriate for the audience, if their themes were engaging, and if they could make needed adjustments to the curriculum—all part of the theoretical development and strategies that they will use when they have their own art classrooms. Some students developed skills and interests that contributed to a clearer career path. After the arts-based service-learning program, many students inquired about graduate school to study art therapy and working for community nonprofit organizations.

Self-Awareness and Personal Development

Through the project, students learned more about themselves, developing confidence, clarifying their values, and realizing their capacity to give and develop patience and compassion. They could also see how their presence benefited and made a difference for a disabled population. Most students acknowledged a sense of importance in regard to their actions during the experience and discussed understanding that importance with future community connections. By the end of the semester, students also showed an increase in competence and efficacy. A few students took on leadership roles and developed those skills throughout the course. The questionnaires and reflections demonstrated that students were compelled to believe that they could bring about change and become civically responsible, and that they had a moral obligation to their communities.
Sensitivity to Diversity

Working with the developmentally disabled, students had a chance to teach art in a different social and cultural context. The experience opened their eyes to being more sensitive to people's needs and to understanding different learning styles and contexts. At the end of the semester, students showed increased awareness of social issues involving the developmentally disabled as well as more positive attitudes toward this population. Students also evidenced increased comfort and confidence in dealing with the developmentally disabled by the end of the semester.

Autonomy and Independence, Sense of Ownership, and Empowerment

Some students developed leadership skills and confidence when working at the CAPC. The entire class, with little guidance, was able to come together and bring about several art-making projects including the graffiti wall, over which they took full ownership. Many students took on extra duties without being asked and developed future ideas for art making at the CAPC.

Communication Skills

After the initial art-making session, students felt a reduction in anxiety around people with developmental disabilities. Many students had never interacted with people with disabilities and were not sure how to communicate with them. As time progressed, students appeared to become more at ease and were quickly developing their communication skills. Each visit during the art-making sessions brought better preparedness and more capability in teaching art. It is important for art teachers to understand adults and children with developmental disabilities because in most schools, art classes include significant numbers of youth with disabilities.

Critical Thinking and Analysis

The reflections reveal that students were able to adjust and think about their teaching in various ways. However, it was not evident that students thought more critically about issues of social justice. They did not explicitly entertain thoughts that connected the situation of developmentally disabled people with political solutions, nor did they mention taking what they learned to service abroad, an approach that would contribute to developing a global awareness of various social justice issues.
Discussion

A principal limitation of the study was the rather small number of students \( n = 18 \) and the limited duration of the experimental treatment. The study was essentially a pilot with limited statistical analysis. The qualitative measures implicit in the reflections supported the goals of the project. However, the statistical design limitations could serve as a starting point for redesigning the research. Overall, more data, replication, and statistical analysis of the project are needed. Another design also might involve reconsidering the mixed method approach.

Moving forward, the arts-based service-learning project will continue, and data will be collected from students. The results of this pilot study allow reflection on how to improve data collection and analysis. First, the topics and goals might lend themselves best to a solely qualitative approach without the quantitative analysis of questionnaires. If the qualitative results strongly indicate that the students perceive their experience as contributing to established goals, that is an important result requiring no additional statistical confirmation.

Creating a dynamic in the course so that students better understand the connections between art education content and the service-learning project is also important. As seen when analyzing questions from the questionnaires, students are not making all the connections the course is meant to convey.

Third, challenging students to an increased awareness of social justice issues in a critical and thorough manner is essential. Although the guiding research goals did not use the term social justice, the connections between art education, service-learning, and social justice are vital. The guiding research goals were inherently intertwined with social justice concepts through the variables and indicators used; however, it may be necessary to revise the research goals to indicate a stronger connection to social justice. Understanding social justice is most likely something that students are learning by example—by observing their instructor facilitating community partnerships, posing problem-solving questions, relating content materials, and interacting with and working alongside students in community settings. Exploring ways to capture this information and creating strategies and models will help art teachers and professors in their own classrooms and arts-based service-learning projects.

Data provided examples of ways in which students showed positive perception changes with each variable; however, working
on in-class discussions and pushing the reflection questions to revolve around more in-depth social justice issues may increase students’ understanding and perceptions to another level. Cipolle (2010) outlined a set of reflection prompts that she called “navigating the stages of white critical-consciousness development” (p. 58), which encourages students of any race to expand their perspectives of social justice. Cipolle’s prompts will be used in further research instead of the widely known service-learning reflection prompts: What? So what? Now what? (Kolb, 1984). Additionally, a more thorough analysis of reflection responses will be explored.

If the pretest and posttest questionnaires remain a part of the research, some questions could be eliminated and others added. This might result in a more fruitful understanding of students’ social justice awareness and perception changes. For example, the questions referring to career and choice of degree might not be as useful as those posed in Cipolle’s (2010) literature that refer to social justice and political and/or global awareness.

In the future, looking at the benefits to the developmentally disabled population will also paint a clearer picture of the overall project. Ideas to further the research design in this manner include requesting that the CAPC leadership participate in the research. They could observe and document the benefits through photography, testimonials, and visiting our class to discuss happenings after each art-making session. These sessions would be audio recorded. The leaders might collect the photos and vignettes into a scrapbook of sorts showing the stories and information that they acknowledge as important to their clients and organization. Questions that might be put to CAPC leadership include the following: How do the CAPC participants perceive the students? How do they benefit from this project? What is the value of such benefits? What are the pitfalls to participation? What type of assessment is desirable for the long-term adoption of such programs?

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the data collected through questionnaires, reflection responses, and art-making session observations suggest that the arts-based service-learning project provided a positive experience for preservice art teachers (i.e., the students in this study). The research indicated that most students learned more about teaching art in a socially and culturally different context and could identify the benefits of teaching arts to others. Students also seemed to gain a better understanding of civic-minded issues. In
addition, they demonstrated their ability to apply the course concepts they had learned.

This program with promise and research is presented to stand as a model for other researchers, arts and community leaders, administrators, and educators who would like to implement service-learning with students in an arts-based organization or an agency for people with developmental disabilities. Although based on a limited pilot study, the model provides a starting point for preservice art educators who are eager and could learn much from applying course concepts in various ways within a community setting.

References


About the Author

Amanda Alexander is an assistant professor of art education, Department of Art + Art History, University of Texas at Arlington. Her research explores (inter)national and local community-based arts research and learning, sustainable social and culture development, and social justice. She earned her Ph.D. from The Ohio State University in art education and a focus in arts administration, education, and policy.
BOOK REVIEWS
Reconstructing Policy in Higher Education: Feminist Poststructural Perspectives thoughtfully illustrates the effect of various theoretical underpinnings on policymaking and policy analysis. Poststructural feminism, the authors argue, supports efforts to dismantle policy and look for embedded assumptions therein that might have unintended results. In rethinking the contexts through which policy takes place, the authors critically review the assumptions of policymakers and analysts and the impact of those perspectives on developing objectives and assessment of policy. Far from presenting a simple exposé of what policy as a whole lacks, the authors use a poststructural feminist theoretical frame to delve into the ways that the assumptions, language, and historical contexts of policymakers and analysts prescribe the trajectories of policy analysis. By using clear examples to illustrate the multiple meanings reflected in a policy, the authors offer a candid and easy-to-read review of policymaking and analysis.

As a whole, the text offers various higher education policy issue examples viewed within the same theoretical framework. This provides readers a review of both feminist poststructural theory and issues of higher education policy that are typically viewed through other theoretical lenses. The authors address a variety of topics: the language of higher education policy, inclusion and diversity policies (such as Title IX and affirmative action), student development and engagement methods, the marketing of higher education to consumers, and research-centered learning policies and foci of universities. Through this theoretical lens, readers are asked to view a varied set of policy issues, the nature of how policies came to be, and how policies are analyzed, as well as how they could be analyzed through a different lens. However, this is not a text about “women’s issues”; rather, this is a text about the ways perspectives inform policy and policy analysis across all issues.

In Chapters 1 and 2, the authors lay the framework for the book, focusing on the empirical studies that are explored in the rest of the text and the way that policy analysis, when viewed through a poststructural feminist perspective, provides insight into such policies. The authors note that the poststructural feminist perspective
does not dichotomize issues, but rather purposefully allows for complexities within policies, discourse, and individuals, thus enabling a review of their complicated relationship. This introduction clearly urges readers to alter their ways of thinking about “the way questions are understood” (p. 9) by questioning the narratives and assumptions built into policies. The remaining three parts of the book are devoted to production of power in policy, objects of policy, and discursive constructions of change within policy.

Part 1 focuses on the role of power and presence in policymaking—that is, the way that policy narrates the lives and needs of individuals as a larger group. The authors of these chapters look at suffrage, the history of higher education, the expressed meanings of higher education for individuals and society, and the roles of female leaders in higher education. They skillfully present examples from the popular discourse on their subject, then use poststructural feminist theory to reenvision the discourse. They also offer methods for questioning the discourse of texts when conducting research in the field to purposefully and thoroughly dismantle dominant narratives rather than simply breaking them apart. For example, a study that recognizes women as vulnerable might focus on enhancing lighting or safety on campus rather than addressing the source of unsafe environments by such means as “naming, challenging, and transforming violent masculinity” (p. 30). The authors make the case for poststructural feminist theory and the ability to put the larger discourse back together in a dynamic and comprehensive manner.

Part 2 of the text focuses on the way the discourse of policy alters the individual’s landscape in terms of positioning within society. The authors of these chapters focus on cases of student development policy, intercollegiate sports policies, and marketing practices in higher education. These authors use poststructural feminist theory to untangle the messages and complications expressed in these policies as they relate to individuals and groups of people. Student development, for instance, often groups like individuals for the purposes of inclusion in student activities. However, these groupings might have nothing to do with the students’ actual identities, but rather reflect established norms regarding “other.” Similarly, Title IX policies that dichotomize men and women oversimplify the issues and thereby offer no dynamic solutions. As an example, policies that posit an equal number of men’s teams and women’s teams conflate a variety of concerns into gender equality as a one-dimensional issue, when in fact larger issues like race, heterosexual norms, culture, and class are involved in access to
sports in school settings. In these chapters, the authors urge policymakers to critically consider the language used when framing the lives and experiences of those their policies are meant to assist. Poststructural feminist theory, as argued throughout the book, offers a varied and innovative approach to issues of equity that focuses on the complexities—rather than the simplifications—of policies and the individuals affected by them.

Part 3 focuses on the way change is constructed in higher education by including the identities and multiple experiences of individuals. The authors of these chapters assert that although individuals have always had their own identities (despite social norms), policy that does not engender and account for those various experiences fails to open up higher education to its potential. Policy that fails to focus on change puts higher education at risk of missing the mark for many individuals whose educational experience must be, on some measure, externally realized rather than inclusive and holistic. That is, their educational experience is lived as an “other” within a system too rigid to include their individual experiences, efforts, and abilities. In these chapters and throughout the book, the authors offer examples as well as possible pathways for changing the narratives of higher education policy. They argue that by missing the complexities in the structures and value system of higher education, stakeholders in the system are drastically underestimating the utility and possibilities of higher education for individuals. The authors focus on the dialogues that have, despite the best efforts to uncover “missing voices,” been overlooked, lumped together, and sectioned off from the norm. This topic is of great importance to those studying the field of higher education because it presents a perspective that is open to multiple experiences and meanings.

This text offers a rich and descriptive review of the interaction of policy and framework through the careful illustration of policy and its larger meanings to individuals and groups. The authors argue that poststructural feminist theory, when applied to higher education, has the ability to disrupt many long-perceived and accepted views of the mission, methods, and outcomes of higher education for the entire populace. Throughout the text, the authors illustrate the ways that issues might be viewed from a poststructural feminist perspective. This frame has the potential to offer innovative and insightful views of work in higher education that expand possible outcomes for students, faculty, administrators, and policymakers. Indeed, using a poststructural feminist perspective may remove many barriers educators face when working to engage
students as well as communities and ultimately, to extend the outreach of a university.

About the Reviewer

Pam L. Gustafson is the assistant director of the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program at LIU Post. Her research focuses on exploring the relationship between admissions processes and outcomes in higher education. She is a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University. She holds an M.A. in history from LIU Post.
The growth of service-learning in higher education has been phenomenal. Since its full emergence in the mid-1980s, service-learning has found its way into the strategic plans, curricula, and student development programs of colleges and universities across the United States. In fact, 91% of the 434 higher education institutions that responded to a recent national survey offer service-learning courses (Campus Compact, 2015); in another national study, approximately 50% of college students reported that they participated in credit-bearing service-learning (Finley, 2012). As a pedagogical strategy and civic engagement practice, service-learning has indeed become “part of the permanent landscape of higher education” (O’Meara, 2011, p. 181).

Accompanying the growth of service-learning—and perhaps fueling it as well—is a remarkable expansion of the literature produced by practitioners and researchers in the field. A recent contribution is Barbara Jacoby’s Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned. Jacoby draws on her extensive experience, and on an ample body of prior research, to produce an informative publication. Organized in a question-and-answer format, Service-Learning Essentials provides answers to dozens of questions about service-learning—particularly about its history, nature, purpose, use, scope, and future. In each of the nine chapters, there are six to 13 questions (many with subsidiary questions) and answers, complemented by references to additional information sources and a short summary.

In the introductory chapter, Jacoby distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential learning and from the broader concept of civic engagement, and she presents service-learning as a program, pedagogy, and philosophy. Questions about service-learning’s history, theoretical foundations, state of practice, and benefits are answered here. Chapter 2 is all about critical reflection, one of the essential elements of the pedagogy. In addition to identifying various forms of reflection, this chapter outlines steps in designing and facilitating the process. Moreover, it supplies sample reflection questions—some general, others organized by discipline. Service-learning practitioners concerned about the inadequacy of traditional service to achieve social change goals will find an instructive answer to this salient question: “How can
critical reflection empower students to move beyond direct service to other forms of civic and political engagement?” (p. 42)

In Chapter 3, Jacoby explains how to develop and sustain campus–community partnerships as a cornerstone of service-learning. She highlights basic principles that guide authentic, mutually beneficial partnerships; describes various types of partnerships; and delineates nine steps to developing an optimal service-learning partnership. Additionally, the author articulates how such partnerships can lead to broader and deeper institutional engagement with the community.

Chapter 4 goes to the heart of effective service-learning practice among faculty. “Integrating Service-Learning Into the Curriculum” contains answers to 13 questions, more than in any other chapter of the book. For example, there are questions about the appropriateness of service-learning pedagogy for different disciplines and courses, whether service-learning is academically rigorous, assessing and grading service-learning, and the unique elements of a service-learning syllabus. This chapter also offers a rich description of multiple forms of service-learning and a detailed discussion of logistical issues involved in teaching a service-learning course. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the question of service-learning’s place in faculty review, promotion, and tenure.

In Chapter 5 of Service-Learning Essentials, Jacoby makes the case for institutions’ design and implementation of cocurricular service-learning. She writes, “Providing a continuum of curricular and co-curricular service-learning experiences contributes to the creation of a seamless learning environment and reinforces the principle that all members of the college community are educators” (p. 153). Student affairs professionals will appreciate the details regarding how service-learning can support student development and contribute to leadership education.

The next chapter covers assessment of service-learning and related partnerships. Given the need to gauge the impact of service-learning on various stakeholders and the challenges inherent in assessment, the author does well to include a whole chapter on this topic. What does service-learning assessment entail? What issues should we consider in choosing assessment methods? How should service-learning be assessed from the community perspective? These are some of the pertinent questions answered. In Chapter 7, the questions and answers focus on administration of service-learning—the institutional infrastructure required, risk-manage-
ment issues, recognition of outstanding work by service-learning participants, and the like.

Chapter 8 provides perspectives on some of the unsettled questions in the service-learning field. Titled “Facing the Complexities and Dilemmas of Service-Learning,” this chapter examines such contentious issues as the appropriateness of service-learning for all students, social justice as the ultimate goal of service-learning, the relationship between service-learning and politics, and disparities between higher education institutions and communities.

In the final chapter, Jacoby presents several strategies for sustaining and advancing service-learning for the benefit of institutions and communities. Questions about institutionalizing service-learning and about service-learning in the online environment are among those answered. Jacoby also emphasizes the need to more fully recognize service-learning alongside community-based research and engaged scholarship in the faculty reward system.

Among the topics covered in more than one chapter is international service-learning. Considering the growing interest in global learning and the attendant challenges (see, for example, Whitehead, 2015), this coverage is not surprising. It is difficult enough to handle the details of service-learning administration (including risk management) in domestic settings. Implementing service-learning abroad requires special attention to policies and procedures as well as “pragmatic concerns” (Jacoby, 2015, p. 218) usually associated with language and culture, health and safety, and the cost of travel and lodging. Jacoby addresses unintended negative consequences of international service-learning by sharing several examples drawn from the literature (Crabtree, 2008). Two examples in particular resonated with me: “service-learning reinforcing for communities that development requires external benefactors” and “members of neighboring communities wondering why no one has come to help them” (p. 251).

From the basic to the advanced, from the fundamentals to the complexities, the questions and answers in Service-Learning Essentials are stimulating and enlightening. This book is distinguished as much by its comprehensiveness as by its Q&A format. In answering various questions, Jacoby presents a good overview of the defining features of service-learning; salient principles underlying its practice; and tried-and-true procedures in its administration, implementation, and assessment. Administrators and faculty will welcome such practical information at their fingertips at a
time when service-learning has become a mainstay of the college curriculum.

Although drawing heavily on the work of other scholars (as reflected, for example, in the 18 figures/exhibits included in the book), Jacoby infuses a distinct freshness into her responses, offering guidance and support for high-quality service-learning practice. She points to cogent evidence of service-learning’s tremendous potential while discouraging an uncritical acceptance of it. Jacoby also notes concomitant challenges and reminds readers that “when not done well, service-learning can have unfortunate effects on students, such as reinforcing their stereotypes and perpetuating the view that service is the most effective means of addressing social issues” (p. xvii).

In the face of the book’s many strengths, I would offer one minor criticism. I take issue with the use of the term *service-learners*, as seen repeatedly in this book. Service-learners implies that students are simply learning service rather than learning through service. My tongue-in-cheek reaction is that students should not be seen as “service-learners” but rather as “learning servers”!

Almost 20 years after she (as lead author and editor) gave us her first service-learning book (*Jacoby, 1996*), Barbara Jacoby has provided a new resource—and an excellent one, at that. *Service-Learning Essentials* is most suitable for administrators and faculty. Even those who are knowledgeable and experienced in service-learning will benefit from reading this book. It will serve as a refresher, reinvigorating practitioners and practice alike. Although the book will be useful also to graduate students taking service-learning courses or doing research on community-engaged pedagogies, it may be considerably less accessible to community partners who lack a thorough grounding in higher education’s approaches to civic engagement. Nevertheless, *Service-Learning Essentials* is a timely resource, especially for practitioners who desire to do service-learning well—or better.

**References**


**About the Reviewer**

**Glenn A. Bowen** is an associate professor and the director of the Center for Community Service Initiatives at Barry University. He developed the university’s service-learning course designation procedure, Service-Learning Faculty Fellows Program, and Faculty Learning Community for Engaged Scholarship. Bowen earned his Ph.D. in social welfare at Florida International University.
Sustainable Knowledge: A Theory of Interdisciplinarity is a valuable, compelling, and quick read for current and future academics and administrators committed to engaged scholarship and outreach, as well as those still in need of convincing. A succinct and—at times—radical take on the core problems facing the academy today, the book begins by rejecting the notion that prolific knowledge production is an unqualified good. Robert Frodeman (2013) reminds his reader that knowledge is practically limited by our capacity to understand, by “time and money,” and by “research itself” (p. 55). With this in mind, he calls on academics to carefully consider “the costs—economic, social, and ethical—of such proliferation” (p. 65). Given the plethora of systemic messes we face today, we need a new approach.

With this critique in mind, Frodeman addresses problems with the disciplining of knowledge in Chapter 2. To the extent that disciplinarity fosters a separation of knowledge production from its use, he argues, it is a mistake. It tends to dig infinitely down instead of out, setting up narrow frames of expertise that often hamper efforts toward collaborative problem-solving on the ground. Interdisciplinarity, assessed in Chapter 3, is—on the other hand—a step in the right direction in that it reminds scholars of the need to address our systemic challenges and to consider the “inherent limitations to knowledge” (p. 42). In practice, however, interdisciplinarity often fails to address real-world problems, privileges and mimics the disciplines, and develops prescriptive formulas and techniques; as a result, it also frequently gets it wrong. Scholars of “wicked problems”—large-scale, interconnected, high-stakes messes—concur with Frodeman’s critique and emphasize these same concerns. They conclude, for instance, that isolation and fragmentation exacerbate the narrow framing of these problems, that idealistic and theoretical expert- or technology-driven solutions will not work, and thus that efforts to ameliorate messy, real-world problems cannot be standardized (Kolb, 2003; Ramaley, 2014; Rittel & Webber, 1973). In such complex situations, amelioration is achieved by collaborative, experiential, and reflective action, through the cocreation of new approaches to long-standing problems.
Ultimately, Frodeman’s analysis of the current structures surrounding knowledge production within the academy leads to an examination of the merits of transdisciplinarity in Chapter 4. He defines transdisciplinarity as the “co-production of knowledge between academic and nonacademic actors,” saying it is the linchpin “marking the end of the era of peer control” (p. 61). It leads us to sustainable knowledge production. Aimed more directly at ameliorating our shared problems, sustainable knowledge operates under a collaborative, transdisciplinary model in which knowledge is both coproduced and more directly linked to its application. Because current and impending crises place us in a position of urgency, where we need to act despite serious resource limitations, a focus on sustainable knowledge is key. The preeminent status of prolific knowledge production in the academy creates serious opportunity costs. Frodeman challenges us to ask ourselves what the costs of this system are: What are we seeking to sustain and what are we “going to let go by the wayside” (p. 72)? To answer such questions, we must expand our epistemological and ethical frameworks; we must acknowledge a responsibility not only to our own “disciplinary cohort” but also to the “larger community.” Here, sustainable knowledge can and should ultimately operate as a “regulative guide” (p. 74).

Although an incredibly valuable and quick read, Sustainable Knowledge could benefit from enacting its call for transdisciplinarity. This volume, in fact, leaves largely unacknowledged a rich well of strategies, tools, and resources for effective bridge-building work, including participatory action research (Fals Borda, 2001), systemic engagement practices (McNall, Barnes-Najor, Brown, Doberneck, & Fitzgerald, 2015), feminism (Iverson & James, 2014), and pragmatism (Lake, 2014). Indeed, engaging these tools, processes, and recommendations is what will make Frodeman’s call for sustainable knowledge sustainable. Although engaged, transdisciplinary scholarship will not automatically yield progress; it will prompt scholars to grapple with the systemic messes society faces. And since the lag between the needs of our time and our dominant institutional responses is still great, our problems still urgent, and our responses still largely inadequate, there is a lot more work to be done.

In the end, Frodeman calls most directly on humanists to take on the task of challenging the barriers posed toward genuinely sustainable and ameliorative knowledge production. We can continue to advance this work by challenging and changing the organizational structures of higher education, reconsidering the expectations within doctoral programs, and shifting the expecta-
ations we place on ourselves. Academics begin to perform this work by stepping into the fray of modern life: as coproducers of knowledge and field practitioners, facilitators and advisors, experts and lay-citizens. In the end, success should be measured “by the extent to which… [we] address the needs of others as they define them,” by the extent to which we literally “change the world” (p. 111).

References

About the Reviewer
Danielle Lake is an assistant professor of liberal studies at Grand Valley State University. Her research focuses on the structures, methods, and processes designed to ameliorate wicked problems. Lake earned her Ph.D. in philosophy at Michigan State University.
In the last decade, there has been a remarkable revolutionary shift in the paradigm of the role of contemporary arts in American society. The emergence of the value of arts as a vital tool for community economic development has launched a lively new body of studies, publications, and civic dialogue on the role of expressive culture in community life, especially in the realm of urban redevelopment initiatives. The work of economists such as Richard Florida (2002, 2012) has contributed significantly to this shift as city planners, elected officials, and arts organizations have embraced this call and have become advocates for the use of arts and culture not as embellishment, but as central driving forces in their policies and practices related to what constitutes a livable and economically viable 21st-century community.

The higher education sector has embraced this new paradigm as well by fostering scholarship and dialogue across the arts, humanities, and social sciences in meaningful ways. As often occurs with new movements, the initial wave of interest galvanized scholars, civic leaders, and community organizations to examine case studies of “successes”: cultural investments that proved to be catalytic in creating magnets for attracting “young creatives” as well as business and housing investments.

This new collection of essays, *Arts and Community Change: Exploring Cultural Development Policies, Practices, and Dilemmas*, is a most welcome contribution, as it brings together the work of a number of scholars and practitioners in a critical framework to offer a deeper examination of the impact of these policies and practices on communities and the lessons that are being learned. Because many universities are now playing active roles in culturally-engaged work, this volume has particular value for those involved in university outreach and engagement.

The book presents an overview of the growing role of arts in community change initiatives and also raises important questions that need serious attention. Although there is no doubt that the role of the arts in the community is a timely and important topic, the contributors demonstrate that even as cultural development work in arts and cultural heritage has been successful, in some cases these
efforts have contributed to conflicts over neighborhood gentrification and ever-expanding inequality in community life. Adopting arts and culture-based development strategies can sometimes not only foster gentrification but deepen class divisions, increase racial and ethnic conflict, and even intensify neighborhood decay. The contributors also observe that some cultural development efforts divert resources and attention from grassroots endeavors and local cultural organizations.

The contributing authors properly note that various methods are being employed in this area, and explanations of this topic can easily oversimplify the work and its impact. The volume makes a strong case for understanding that cultural economic development involves arts and cultural work with communities that is varied, complex, multifaceted, and difficult.

*Arts and Community Change* raises an important question: What kind of cities and neighborhoods are being designed—and for whom—when they are created? The attention that Richard Florida has brought to the “creative class” has resulted in a body of scholarship that raises questions about the impact of the way arts and culture are commodified for community development and the resulting impact of this approach in fostering socioeconomic segregation and social distancing.

The authors in this volume collectively convey their concern that the very idea of “cultural development” is a form of cultural intervention in the life of a locale—whether it be a region, city, neighborhood, or block. The underlying argument is that simply “conceiving arts as an economic engine has its limits” (*Stephenson & Tate, 2015, p.*). Having noted the cautions that are apparent throughout this collection of essays about the necessary reconsideration of the way cultural economic development is fostered, the book makes a strong case for the potential for using arts as a tool for building citizen agency and generating greater individual and social capital. The authors present a number of inspiring examples that demonstrate how this potential has been realized—at least on some level.

In many respects, this volume is a call for rethinking how university outreach and engagement frame their community development work. It provides valuable insights into a more community-centered approach to cultural economic development policy and practice. In the past decade, engagement scholarship has embraced the idea of cocreation based on a commitment to values shared by university and community. These shared values include equity,
representation, transparency, and inclusive democratic citizenry. However, there is much room for the engagement field to add to the evaluation of the contributions of arts to community development. Engagement scholarship has much to offer in terms of assessing impacts of cultural economic development, as well as building enlightened social capital in communities. This includes higher education’s participation in the placemaking movement, a multidisciplinary effort where the scholarship raises some similar cautions and proposes alternative “local citizen” empowerment approaches to cultural development.

In the introduction to the book, the editors convey their vision for the collected essays in this way:

The framework for the book draws on the concept of imaginaries... multiple and intersecting ideas, images, myths, and stories of place and community in various stages of development and coexistence.... [Focus is on] the difficulties and tensions in evidence among major groups contending to define or redefine their community’s imagined geography. (Stephenson, & Tate, 2015, p. 5)


Readers will find the volume’s focus on arts heavily weighted toward examples from the performing arts rather than from community cultural centers, museums (especially ethnically-specific
museums and those that are sites of conscience or eco-museums), and community arts projects. In addition, there is an absence of the creative community-engagement work that is being led by university-based museums, art centers, and performing arts centers, as well as innovative university-based academic colleges in the arts and humanities that are doing exemplary community-engaged work. However, this foundational volume sets the stage for additional scholarship of engagement by leaders of university-based cultural organizations, as there is real value in contributions to assessment of the cultural economic development and the evolution of community life by those who are both practitioners and scholars.

This volume speaks in many respects to the heart of outreach and engagement theory and practice. The rich potential of creating community vitality and ownership for our work begins with asking essential questions about our practice: Who is involved? How can we foster democratic community participation and realize the goals of shared authority? How do we honor the understanding of the community history and the related cultural assets? How can local values and existing patterns of convening/communicating be recognized? How can we help evolve a viable community identity and contribute to the ever-changing nature of cultural life of our communities? What is often overlooked is the involvement of scholars who can shed light on the ethnographic composition of communities and help “read” the living cultural assets that are often right in front of us. This perspective may help us avoid some of the failures to embrace community resources as powerful indicators of local culture and to recognize that they should be the starting place for community cultural development.

Finally, it is worth noting that this volume will serve as an effective text for those involved in teaching community outreach and civic engagement. The combination of voices represented in the volume—from remarkable dance activists such as Liz Lerman to Imagine America leader Jan Cohen-Cruz—makes this an especially timely contribution. The editors are to be congratulated for assembling and framing contributions from these diverse and thoughtful voices.

References

**About the Reviewer**

*C. Kurt Dewhurst* is director of Arts and Cultural Initiatives, University Outreach and Engagement; director emeritus and curator of Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Michigan State University Museum; and professor of English, Michigan State University. His research interests include folk arts, material culture, ethnicity, occupational folk culture, cultural economic development, and cultural heritage policy.
Guest Reviewers
We extend our sincere thanks to our guest peer-reviewers for Volume 19 (2015).

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