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From the Guest Editors…

Brian Davenport and Barbara Holland

As I (Brian) think back to spring 2020 when the call for this special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* went out, I am struck by how right and how wrong I was in my thinking at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we talked about the idea for this issue, I was struck by the certainty that our world was never going to go back to how it was at the beginning of 2020. As I reflect on the current reality, I am just as certain of this as ever. However, when I look at how things are now and appear to be going forward, the emerging changes are radically different from what I thought would happen. This special issue is a testament to that divergence, and the results are better than I could have imagined.

While talking through what we might do for this special issue, I (Brian again) envisioned the time of isolation and distance as an opportunity for community engagement scholars and practitioners to step back and reflect on the past with the goal of leaning into and creating the future as it emerges. This presencing that asks us to seek out "learning by sensing and actualizing emerging future possibilities" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 9) sounds lovely. It is also something that I still believe has value. However, as the past 17 and counting months have taught me, the reflection necessary for this type of learning is difficult when your goal every day is simply to find moments of thriving in the midst of surviving. As a field, we know the importance of reflection. I don't need to remind anyone of the power and necessity of reflection. What I have learned, however, is that reflection is incredibly challenging when so much energy is being expended simply trying to move forward in the face of never before experienced or imagined challenges. Even as I attempt to look back in writing this, I am struck by how difficult reflection still is due to the challenges I continue to experience. Even as you read this, you are likely not surprised by the idea of challenges still being a part of our day-to-day life. Although we were all challenged, so much of what those challenges were and continue to be seems to depend on our own circumstances. The reality of challenge continues to be universal, but the specific challenges themselves are definitely personal. Although there is certainly shared experience in living through a pandemic, each time I hear a story I am struck by how unique the experience was for each person. Yet, in spite of it all, we continue. Not only do we continue, but I am reminded that the work of community engagement continues to be of utmost importance because, as Pulleyblank (1999) reminded us, "community is not just an asset, but it is a necessity when life is filled with difficulties" (p. 475).

Although the challenges of the last 17 months (and counting) ensured that this process didn't unfold as envisioned, this does not mean that there were no insights gleaned from this time and experience. The following articles are invaluable records of how the role of higher education institutions had to pivot quickly both internally and externally. Zolli and Healy (2012) described resilience as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances" (p. 7). This description fits both the results of this issue and the field of community engagement. Every article in this issue is a testament to maintaining the core purpose of both the author(s) and the commitments that community engagement makes. For some, this meant finding unique ways to pivot ongoing research projects to adapt to the restrictions of COVID-19 while still maintaining the commitment to the core purpose of community-engaged scholarship. This can be seen in how deftly Filoteo, Singerhouse, Crespo-Carrión, and Martin shifted a participatory action research project focused on the youth sex trade in

Minnesota from an in-person to a virtual project.

The commitment to honoring the purpose of community-engaged scholarship can also be demonstrated in the fascinating work of De Bernardi, Rezende, Franco, and Miranda as they attempted to pivot an ongoing project in Brazil to a virtual setting. This was especially difficult given that many of the participants were at higher risk from COVID-19. Guy and Arthur also demonstrated ways to continue with engaged research while comparing and contrasting the process pre- and post-Covid-19. Finally, Donnelly, Toof, and Silka not only explored how to pivot research projects, but also leaned into the reality of resilience during the pandemic by exploring how previously established partnerships contributed to the resilience needed to move forward in the work.

Although several authors demonstrate resilience in their ongoing community-engaged research, this does not mean that the hoped-for reflection in this special issue did not take place. Pieces by Donnelly, Toof, and Silka and by Berkey and Lauder take a reflective approach to past practice to learn how to resiliently move into the future. Donnelly, Toof, and Silka explore how connections that were developed during community-based participatory research led to more resilient partnerships when the need to radically shift due to COVID-19 emerged. In contrast, Berkey and Lauder examine the practice of a university engagement office pre- and post-Covid-19 to understand how they shifted well and where they can continue to improve.

Resilience and reflection can also be seen in how strategically and compassionately faculty shifted their work and focus as they continued to serve both students and community in their community-engaged teaching. The need for resilience was not limited to engaged faculty. Mejia explores how faculty can continue to perform community-engaged work in spite of the limitations created by COVID-19 while also being both aware of and responsive to the challenging circumstances faced by students during this time. Adding student voice to the consideration of student experiences during COVID-19, Fry, Brown, and Sass explore how COVID-19 required students to radically shift their priorities due to the challenges created by the pandemic.

Finally, as we explore the idea of resilience in the face of significant challenges, pieces by Martin and Seru remind us that the ongoing challenges faced over the course of the pandemic were not just due to the presence of a virus. Seru shares how one Minnesota university responded to the social unrest understandably brought about by the killing of George Floyd. Adding to this is Martin's exploration of how Black and Indigenous thought can add to everyone's ability to explore and find a path forward through the challenges created by the intersection of COVID-19 and the ongoing unrest created by racial injustice.

As I (Brian again) look back over the last 17 months, I am struck by the fact that not only do the pieces in this issue all speak to the resilience of community engagement, but their very existence is a testament to the resilience of the authors themselves. As this issue was progressing, the reality of the pandemic created significant challenges to moving forward on numerous occasions. Yet, in spite of these very real challenges, each of the authors persisted, and the results add necessary perspectives to the ongoing work of the field of community engagement as it seeks to understand how best to create the future that is emerging. I am grateful that even though we all faced significant challenges, we continued to move forward. With this in mind, I offer my thanks to all the authors, to the editorial team at the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, the fantastic peer reviewers, and my editing partner Dr. Barbara Holland. All of you played important roles in bringing this issue to completion.

As we continue to move forward, I want to encourage everyone involved in the work of community engagement to continue to be resilient. As part of this, I ask you to lean on one another as you continue to navigate the collective and unique challenges all of us are facing, as I believe this is key to both the resilience of the field and our individual resilience. The multifaceted pandemic began over a year ago, and even though it created what seemed like insurmountable obstacles, we have persisted. Sadly, this need for resilience is going to continue, as it is apparent we are not yet through the challenges. However, as the scholarship in this special issue demonstrates, our ability to pivot in the face of significant challenges will continue to make community engagement a critically important aspect of the work we are all called to perform.

About the Guest Editors

Brian Davenport *currently serves as director of both the Office of Community Engagement and the newly launched MS in Organizational Leadership at Eastern Washington University. After earning a PhD in leadership studies from Gonzaga University, Davenport has served as a faculty member at the University of Southern Maine as well as an associate dean at Eastern Washington University. His research interests focus on the intersection of various aspects of leadership, organizational theory, and community engagement. Finally, and most importantly, he considers it a privilege to be Nika's husband and Grace's dad.*

Barbara A. Holland*, is an internationally recognized scholar on organizational change in higher education with a focus on institutional change and community engagement strategies. She held senior leadership roles at academic institutions in the United States and Australia and has consulted in many other countries. Holland has been affiliated with the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities since its founding and continues today as a strategic advisor. She is a distinguished professor at University of Nebraska Omaha, which is home to the Barbara A. Holland Collection for Service Learning and Community Engagement that continues to grow as the most comprehensive repository of literature on community engagement. Her current work focuses on the development of more focused institutional strategic agendas of engagement through improved practices in monitoring and measuring engagement activities and partnerships. She resides in Portland, Oregon.*

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Impact of COVID-19 on a Participatory Action Research Project: Group-Level Assessments With Undergraduate Women in Engineering

Batsheva Guy and Brittany Arthur

Abstract

We have been working with undergraduate women in engineering to assess their experiences on campus and during their co-op rotations in order to influence equitable programming and inclusive practices at our institution. Our main methodology is group-level assessment, a qualitative, participatory research method that is rooted in inclusivity, stakeholder engagement, and instigating actionable change. When our university went remote, we were faced with the challenge of transitioning our community research partnership online and continuing to use our chosen method. The current article compares participant experiences in in-person and remote environments to assess the effectiveness of moving our participatory research practices to an online platform. Findings indicated that although both in-person and virtual group-level assessments allowed participants to better understand others' experiences and allowed their voices to be heard, the in-person method was more engaging. However, the virtual method allowed more time for action planning.

Keywords: participatory action research, community-based participatory research, group-level assessment, participatory methods, women in engineering, higher education

As participatory action researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic, we struggle with maintaining meaningful collaboration with our community partners while navigating social distancing guidelines. Because community-based participatory research relies heavily upon authentic connection and communication with coresearchers (Lindquist-Grantz & Vaughn, 2016; Vaughn, Jacquez, & Zhen-Duan, 2018), lockdowns and quarantines have been challenging obstacles to overcome as we continue attempting to implement participatory research methods while maintaining the integrity of our projects. Research progress overall at Research-1 institutions, like our university, has been significantly impacted by pandemic restrictions (Harper et al., 2020; Omary et al.,2020).

For the past several years, we have been working with undergraduate women in engineering (UWiE) at a large, public, midwestern research university to assess their experiences on campus and during their co-op rotations in order to influence equitable programming and inclusive practices at our institution. We have been primarily using group-level assessment (GLA), a qualitative, participatory research method that is rooted in inclusivity, stakeholder engagement, and instigating actionable change (Arthur & Guy, 2020; Guy, 2020; Guy & Boards, 2019; Vaughn & Lohmueller, 2014). When our university went remote, we were faced with the challenge of transitioning our community research partnership online and continuing to use our chosen method.

The current article seeks to compare participant experiences in in-person and remote environments to assess the effectiveness of moving our participatory research practices to an online platform. We will analyze data from coresearcher reflections on the GLA process pre- and postpandemic, in addition to semistructured interview data and researcher reflections, in order to determine whether transferring the method online was effective in terms of factors such as authentic dialogue, participant engagement, and inclusivity. We will also include our own reflections upon the success of the techniques.

Authors' Positionalities

Batsheva's Positionality

I am a participatory action researcher specializing in participatory qualitative and arts-based methodologies. When the pandemic hit and universities went remote, my first thought was how my collaborators and I would be able to maintain meaningful relationships with our coresearchers and community partners. Luckily, unlike many instructors making the switch to online environments, I already had experience teaching online and conducting research virtually. In 2016, I hosted an online GLA with STEM faculty focused on active learning in the classroom (Guy, 2017). Although this GLA was not as engaging as I would have liked it to be, I never made the time to revisit its outcomes to explore how it could have been improved. Our unexpected remote situation became an opportunity for testing a new method for hosting online GLA.

Brittany's Positionality

As a doctoral student I was set to conduct my dissertation research in summer 2020. After the reality of the pandemic set in, I quickly realized that my original plan of facilitating a participatory qualitative research study was going to look different than I had originally imagined. One of the beautiful aspects of using participatory methods is that they are flexible, and GLA is no different. Through deep reflection and conversations with advisors/colleagues, I created a process to bring GLA to life in a virtual setting, with the hope of remaining as authentic to an in-person offering as possible. I deeply believe in the empowering aspect of using thoughtful participatory approaches, and I tried to be very intentional on maintaining that component in an online framework. As a participatory researcher, I believe we must continue to explore ways to bring our approaches, frameworks, and methods to life in virtual settings, to ensure we continue to meet the needs of our communities.

Method

Prepandemic, we hosted three in-person GLAs between the spring and fall of 2018 with UWiE on our university's campus. Although our plans to hold an additional series of GLAs were thwarted by COVID-19 restrictions, we worked to transfer the method to an online environment and held two more GLAs in spring 2020. In this article, we outline the process of the in-person, traditional GLAs, and explain how we modified the process to work in an online modality. We detail our methods for collecting and analyzing the three sources of primary data for this article: (a) participant reflections post-GLA, (b) semistructured interviews, and (c) researcher memos and reflections. The reflection responses and semistructured interview data in conjunction with researcher reflections serve as the primary sources of data for this study. The responses to the GLA prompts, which were collected and analyzed for a separate research study, are not the salient source of data for the current study. This research project was designated as nonhuman subjects research (exempt from review) by our institution's IRB.

Participants

Participants consist of UWiE students at our university. Participants were recruited via email through a filtered mailing list. The spring, summer, and fall 2018 GLAs included 31, 39, and nine participants (n = 79), respectively, and the two online GLAs included 15 and 13 participants, respectively (n = 28). Two participants from the in-person GLAs also participated in the online GLAs and were invited to participate in semistructured interviews. UWiE were able to participate in one of the 2018 GLAs and one from 2020 because the former focused on general experiences and the latter on participation in cooperative education.

In-Person GLA Method

GLA, like most participatory methods, is traditionally carried out in a face-to-face environment. The purpose of a GLA, in general, is to gain information on a specific

topic or issue from a group of stakeholders and work with the stakeholders to create an action plan that will address issues that arose during the process (Vaughn & DeJonckheere, 2019; Vaughn, Jacquez, Deters, et al., 2020). For our specific research project, we conducted GLAs with UWiE in order to better understand their experiences on campus and during cooperative education. The GLA process we implemented involves seven phases, or steps:

1. **Climate setting**: An in-person icebreaker is facilitated.
2. **Generating**: Participants respond to written prompts throughout the room that are posted on the walls.
3. **Appreciating**: Participants walk around the room and read all prompt responses. They draw a star (*) or checkmark (✓) next to the responses they agree with.
4. **Understanding**: In small groups, participants determine themes across an assigned set of prompts.
5. **Selecting**: As a large group, the facilitator guides participants in sharing and consolidating themes.
6. **Action**: The facilitator guides the participants through creating an action plan based on the final themes.
7. **Reflecting**: Participants individually respond to reflection prompts on paper. (Adapted from Vaughn & Lohmueller, 2014)

Online GLA Method

Because the traditional GLA method is hosted in person, we had to make several modifications for the process to run efficiently in a virtual environment, including rearranging some of the phases. Table 1 illustrates the differences between the in-person and online GLA methods, including the variations in the order of the steps.

Reflections

Following the in-person GLA, participants completed an exit survey in which they responded to three reflection questions:

Table 1. Comparing In-Person and Online GLA Phases

GLA Phase	**In-Person GLA**	**Online GLA**
Phase 1	**Climate Setting**: In-person icebreaker facilitated.	**Generating** (pre-online GLA): Participants type their responses to prompts in an online survey.
Phase 2	**Generating**: Participants respond to written prompts throughout the room.	**Appreciating** (pre-online GLA): Participants read everyone's responses in a shared document and type an asterisk (*) next to the responses they agree with.
Phase 3	**Appreciating**: Participants walk around the room and read all prompt responses; they draw a star (*) or checkmark (√) next to the responses they agree with.	**Climate setting**: Online icebreaker facilitated in the main room of a video conferencing software.
Phase 4	**Understanding**: In small groups, participants determine themes across an assigned set of prompts.	**Understanding**: In small group breakout rooms, participants determine themes across an assigned set of prompts.
Phase 5	**Selecting**: As a large group, the facilitator guides participants in sharing and consolidating themes.	**Selecting**: As a large group in the main room, the facilitator guides participants in sharing and consolidating themes.
Phase 6	**Action**: The facilitator guides the participants through creating an action plan based on the final themes.	**Action**: The facilitator guides the participants through creating an action plan based on the final themes.
Phase 7	**Reflecting**: Participants individually respond to reflection prompts on paper.	**Reflecting** (post-online GLA): Participants individually reflect upon their experiences in a post-GLA survey.

1. How did participating in the GLA change your perspective?
2. What did you enjoy about this process or what would you change?
3. Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to add?

Following the virtual GLA, participants were asked to respond to the following reflection questions, including two additional questions about the virtual format:

1. In a few words, what are your initial thoughts after participating in the GLA?
2. How do you feel that the virtual format of this GLA impacted your overall experience?
3. What did you enjoy about this overall process or what would you change?
4. Did participating in the GLA change your perspective? If yes, how?
5. Is there anything else that we didn't cover that you'd like to add?

We analyzed the collective responses to the reflection questions using summative content analysis to compare and contrast the GLA reflections (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) through the following steps:

1. **Keywords**: Following an initial readthrough of the reflection responses, we determined salient keywords across each reflection type (in-person versus online reflection responses).
2. **Counting**: We then counted the frequency of the keywords in each reflection type.
3. **Coding**: Next, we determined a series of codes and, subsequently, overarching categories based on the keywords.
4. **Comparison**: Finally, we compared keywords and codes from the reflections between the two types of GLAs.

Interviews

We conducted semistructured interviews (Brown & Danaher, 2019) with two participants who engaged in both an in-person GLA *and* an online GLA. The interviews were intended to better understand the differences between participants' experiences of the two types of GLAs, particularly in the context of authentic dialogue, engagement, and inclusivity. The following questions were used during the interviews, with follow-up questions as needed in accord with the semistructured style as described in Brown and Danaher (2019).

1. How was your experience with the in-person GLA different from the virtual one? How were they similar?
2. What do you feel were the strengths and weaknesses of the in-person GLA compared to the virtual GLA, and vice versa?
3. Which GLA process do you feel allowed for more authentic dialogue? Please explain your answer.
4. Which GLA process do you feel had higher participant engagement? Please explain your answer.
5. Which GLA process do you feel was more inclusive? Please explain your answer.
6. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about your in-person and/or virtual GLA experience?

Half hour interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via video conferencing software.

We analyzed the interview transcripts using the constant comparison method of qualitative data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Memon et al., 2017), using procedures adapted from Memon et al. (2017):

1. **Initial coding**: We identified repeated schemes following the two interviews.
2. **Stage 1, Inductive category coding**: We created a list of initial categorizations following the primary review of the interview transcripts.
3. **Stage 2, Refinement of categories**: Next, we finalized inclusion rules for the categories and developed an initial coding system.
4. **Stage 3, Exploration of relationships across categories**: We then continued to organize the codes into final groupings.
5. **Stage 4, Integration of data**: The final step involved synthesizing the codes and finalizing the themes from the interviews.

Researcher Reflection

Following each GLA, we hosted reflective discussions with one another in person (prepandemic) and via online video conferencing software (during COVID-19 restrictions) to share how we felt the process went, what could be improved, and to perform initial reviews of the data. We then used memoing as an analytical strategy to further pull meaning from the data sets and our own experiences, and as a "tool for conducting a comparative analysis" in the case of the current study (Birks et al., 2008, p. 71). In general, we utilized memoing to achieve the following goals, as outlined in Birks et al. (2008):

1. **Reflecting**: Determine what the findings mean for us and our research
2. **Summarizing**: Create summaries of the data in our own words
3. **Extracting**: "Extract" meaning from the data (p. 70)
4. **Comparing**: Compare data from each set

Integrative Analysis

Following the summative content analysis of the semistructured interviews, constant comparison analysis of the reflections, and analytic memoing of our own reflections, findings were combined and consolidated using an integrative analysis (Bazeley, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2017). The purpose of integrative analysis is to triangulate findings from analysis of multiple types of qualitative data sets (Bazeley, 2011)—in this case, the findings from participant reflections, semistructured interviews, and researcher reflections. Figure 1 provides a visual of the analyses of the three data types.

We carried out the integrative analysis following the below procedure as adapted from Bazeley (2011):

1. **Analyzing**: Analyze data from multiple sources separately
2. **Coding**: Determine overlapping themes and create consolidated codes/categories

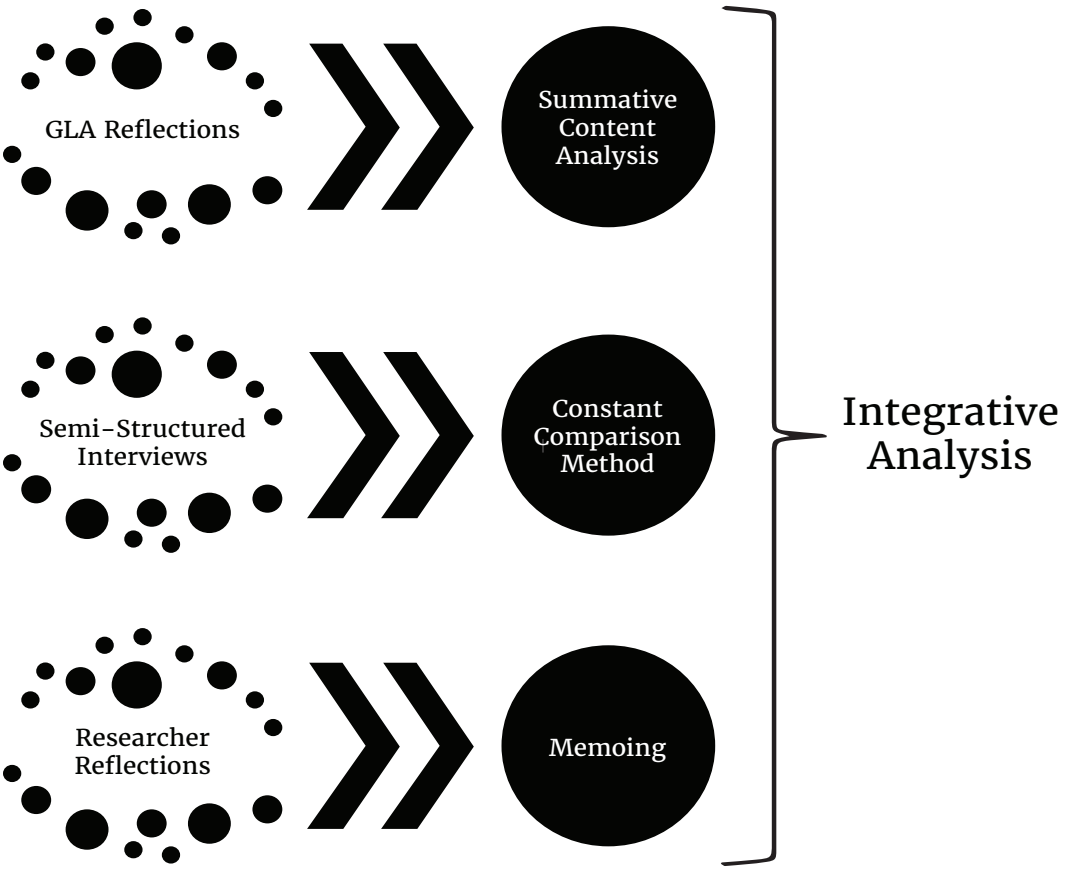

Figure 1. Integrative Data Analysis

3. **Consolidating**: Address divergent, or inconsistent, findings
4. **Finalizing**: Finalize overarching themes

Below we detail the results of the final themes extracted via the integrated analysis.

Findings

Following the analysis of each data source and the combined integrative analysis, the following themes emerged in comparing the experiences of the in-person to the online GLAs: (1) awareness of others' experiences, (2) voice heard, (3) connection and engagement, and (4) potential for change. Themes 1 and 2 capture similarities between the two methods, whereas Themes 3 and 4 illuminate key differences.

Theme 1: Awareness of Others' Experiences

A similarity between the in-person and virtual GLAs involved participants' feelings that as a result of participating they became more aware of other women's experiences in engineering. In both types of GLAs, the women felt they understood more about their peers' experiences and also appreciated hearing about others' experiences. As one woman from an in-person GLA explained, "It made me aware of other females experiencing the same issues and other issues we struggle with that I haven't experienced." This sentiment is reflected in comments from a virtual GLA participant who shared that it was "nice to hear from a variety of people about their experiences, not just people you are personally connected to. It gives some validity to my experiences to know others have encountered similar problems." Both the in-person and virtual GLA participants felt that process helped them gain "insight" and "learn more" about other women's experiences and better "understand . . . the problems they face." An in-person GLA participant explained that "it made me realize that many other women in engineering feel the same way I do," and a virtual GLA participant described learning about other women as "eye-opening."

Theme 2: Voice Heard

Another similarity between the types of GLAs was that the women felt that their voice was heard in both experiences. As an in-person GLA participant succinctly explained the sentiment: "I feel like my voice is being heard." A woman who participated in the virtual GLA felt the same way: "It was . . . nice to have my voice heard and be able to listen to other women in engineering passionate enough about this to take time out of their day to contribute." Not only did the women in both GLAs express feeling heard, they also felt valued, sharing that the GLA "made me feel understood" and "showed me that my concerns have validation." Another participant indicated, "I felt like my experiences and thoughts were listened to and cared about." One of the interviewees agreed that feeling her voice was heard was equal in both types of GLA, and she shared that she thought "people still were able to have their voices heard" during the virtual session.

Theme 3: Connection and Engagement

A difference between the in-person and virtual GLAs was the level of connection and engagement. Although the in-person GLA reported high levels of connection with other participants and engagement in the process, the virtual GLA fell short. In person, participants felt they were in a "very supportive environment." The women shared that they "enjoyed feeling open and talking about experiences." Participants in the in-person GLA described the GLA as "fun and interactive!" and "very collaborative."

On the other hand, although some participants in the virtual GLA explained that they felt connected when people turned on their video and that "the virtual format was just as good as face-to-face," many participants felt the online experience was less personal and "not as natural as an in-person conversation." Many of the participants also reported issues with the flow of the session, indicating that "it was a little slow to transition on time" and "I think conversation would've flowed easier and been more collaborative in person." That said, a few of the women did appreciate the small group breakout sessions, sharing that "the breakout rooms were particularly useful," with one woman explaining that she "immediately [felt] more connected with my female engineering peers and like a part of a big group of confident women."

The interviewees, who attended both the in-person and virtual GLAs, confirmed the sentiment that the in-person GLA was more engaging. The first interviewee explained

that "it was definitely just a little bit different not to be able to see everyone's face and see the, like, physical themes and Post-it notes together." The second interviewee agreed, saying that "literally seeing other peoples' responses, even if I didn't know who they were, made me feel more comfortable in the situation [than] with the survey."

Theme 4: Potential for Change

Although the virtual GLA was less engaging than the in-person session, the virtual GLA allowed for more discussion about action items due to more flexibility with time, as the generating phase was completed ahead of time. The women in the in-person GLA acknowledged the time constraints, in that they wished there was more time to "focus on action items." Another woman felt the same way, expressing she wished there was "more time for talk and action items." One of the interviewees shared: "I definitely appreciated in the virtual one that it saved us quite a bit of time and we had more time to just discuss the themes in the action items."

The same sentiment was expressed by the other interviewee, who said that "the virtual GLA did a really good job of generating more action items." The virtual GLA participants were in agreement, as one woman shared that the "GLA showed me that change can come from discussion and sharing experiences," and another expressed that "I really enjoyed that we helped to come up with action items." One participant was surprised, saying, "It was far more productive than I was expecting."

Discussion

In summary, key themes that arose in comparing experiences between the in-person and online GLAs included (1) awareness of others' experiences, (2) voice heard, (3) connection and engagement, and (4) potential for change. These findings demonstrate that although there are similarities in the two methods, each has clear pros and cons. Both in-person and online GLAs helped make participants aware of their peers' experiences, as well as made them feel validated and that their voices were heard. That said, connection and engagement between participants and with facilitators were higher during the in-person GLAs. A strength of the online GLAs, on the other hand, was the increased time available to focus on action items.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the current study was the difference between the number of participants in the in-person GLAs (n = 79) versus the online GLAs (n = 28). This discrepancy could be overcome in the future as we host more online GLAs and continue to gather reflections. Additionally, because only two participants engaged in both types of GLA, we were able to conduct only two semistructured interviews. However, as we combined and triangulated several sources of data, we were able to maintain reliability.

Future Directions

Even as social distancing restrictions are lifted, what we have learned from hosting online GLAs can continue to benefit community-based research. Conducting GLAs in a virtual environment will allow GLAs to be facilitated across time zones and locations. Online GLAs could open up the doors for more efficiently conducting international, interdisciplinary research. Virtual collaboration within communities across countries and cultures could open new doors in the realm of participatory research. In the specific context of our work with UWiE, a future study could involve hosting virtual GLAs across the United States at similar universities (large, public, urban R1 institutions) and comparing the experiences of UWiE. Without the barrier of location, we could engage even more women at a variety of comparable institutions. A study gathering data on UWiE across universities would allow multistate participants to collaborate on action items. Such a study could instigate a nationwide call to action for gender-equitable programming in engineering and even the creation and implementation of tailored programming at multiple institutions *for* UWiE, *with* UWiE, empowering women at multiple universities.

Furthermore, the techniques we implemented and lessons we learned developing the online GLA process could be translated to a variety of participatory research methods, such as photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), future creating workshop (Raider-Roth et al., 2021), and action interviews (Nielsen & Lyhne, 2016), to name a few. Implementing an online version of photovoice would allow us to capture a variety of voices in a creative way while empowering women to develop their own research questions, implement

a hands-on approach to collecting data, and develop action items to empower and instigate positive change (Duffy, 2011). We would tailor Sutton-Brown's (2014) methodological guide to photovoice into an online environment.

The principles we applied to move traditional GLA to an online environment can also be utilized when implementing a multitude of additional methods and research techniques virtually. Moving more traditional qualitative methods—for example, focus groups and interviews—online could also be a beneficial future direction. As participatory researchers we must continue to explore and research how our approaches can translate into an online format, to ensure the integrity of the approach is maintained.

Implications

Utilization of participatory research methods in an online environment has implications far beyond our single study with UWiE. Online implementation of community-based participatory research both during and after the pandemic could have wider health and well-being applications, such as addressing how communities and individuals are coping as a result of the pandemic itself. Therefore, larger groups within communities can be empowered to suggest action items that could be implemented to serve communities in a targeted way during COVID-19. For example, Nguyen et al. (2020) implemented community-based participatory research to respond to community needs during the pandemic, and Wild et al. (2021) used a participatory research project to communicate COVID-19 health information to communities. Moving aspects of participatory research projects to an online format can reach higher percentages of populations in underserved communities, and enable implementation of action items to improve health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, when these communities are at their most vulnerable.

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Virtual Engagement of Youth in the Time of COVID-19 and Social Uprisings: Youth Voice, Sex Trading, and the Future of Engaged Research

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Abstract

This article describes a novel virtual participatory action research (VPAR) approach to engaging youth who trade sex in Minnesota. The Minnesota Youth Sex Trading (MYST) Project switched to an entirely virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of an intergenerational team, Millennial and Generation Z researchers created a research-brand using technical marketing skills and knowledge of online youth culture to engage youth and other stakeholders in the project. This approach centered trust-building, accountability, transparency, and authenticity to build an online community and increase connection with marginalized young people via Instagram. Responding to COVID-19 and social uprisings, we have adapted our engagement strategies in ways that contain valuable insights into young people's engagement in research. This article illuminates promising VPAR principles to engage youth online as experts in prevention, intervention, and wellness promotion, yielding important new insights about the future of engaged research.

Keywords: engagement, youth voice, sex trading, COVID-19, social media

Sex trading among youth disproportionately impacts marginalized people, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color–identifying (BIPOC) youth and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or other marginalized sexual and gender identities (LGBTQ+; Martin et al., 2021; Ulloa et al., 2016). Participatory action research (PAR) is a critical way to center youth voices to develop accurate and grounded knowledge as well as prevention and intervention strategies (Anyon et al., 2018; Gerassi et al., 2017; Martin, 2013; Shamrova & Cummings, 2017). Scholars and young activists have advocated innovative approaches to engaged research, including youth participatory action research, social activism, and movement building (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Rombalski, 2020). However, higher education engagement efforts can be expanded and enriched through greater recognition of youth as essential research stakeholders with knowledge and leadership potential to cocreate research.

This article offers reflections on youth engagement from our work on the Minnesota Youth Sex Trading (MYST) Project. The MYST Project is a participatory, mixed-methods project working *with* youth and communities to prevent youth sex trading and its collateral harms. The term *youth sex trading* refers to anyone 24 years old or younger exchanging sex or sexual activity to receive something of value. It includes a wide range of experiences, such as exploitation and trafficking (Minnesota Department of Health, n.d.). This article describes our project, illustrates lessons learned, and proposes a novel theoretical and methodological approach that we refer to as *virtual participatory action research* (VPAR). This approach was born out of our team's adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic and antiracism social uprisings in Minneapolis,

the city where this research takes place and in which the recent police-involved murder of George Floyd occurred. These factors and events contribute new insights and practices to the field.

In this article, first, we review foundational literature on engagement in higher education and action research. Next, we describe the project and preliminary outcomes. Then, we define and describe our concept of a *research-brand* as an approach to building trust for engaging youth online. This includes how the concept evolved through practice and community partner collaboration. Finally, through a discussion of our theory of VPAR and lessons learned, we offer insights for researchers seeking to engage youth online or to engage any research population online to address gaps in underrepresented populations from their studies. This includes several rich ideas for the future of engaged research to increase access, reach, and representation for higher quality research and data outcomes.

Literature Review

Engagement in Higher Education

The MYST Project's approach to collaboration with young people moves to the future of engaged scholarship. This approach builds on a foundation of advancements in action-based and participatory research approaches in academia from the 1990s to the present. Institutions of higher education recognize the need to engage with communities to remain relevant, actualize civic purpose, and contribute to addressing our world's most pressing challenges while also meeting the tripartite mission of research, teaching, and service (Beaulieu, 2018; Boyer, 1990, 1996; Cantor et al., 2013; Furco, 2010; Seifer et al., 2012). Nevertheless, a gap remains between the ideals of engagement and academic practices' realities (Warren et al., 2018). Holland and Malone (2019) argued that grand and global challenges "require academic institutions to shift their culture and join in the development of effective actions" (p. 2). In other words, academic research needs to collaborate more broadly and be action focused to truly address our most pressing societal issues and remain a relevant and vital force in civil society in the future.

To answer the call to engage, some institutions have focused change efforts internally within higher education institutions, a process referred to as institutionalization of engagement. This work seeks to create infrastructural pathways that support engagement. Institutionalization also aims to raise engaged scholarship within academic reward systems such as promotion and tenure review, training, professional development, and revenue generation (Cunningham & Smith, 2020; Furco, 2010; Holland, 2009; Weerts, 2019). The work described in this article has benefited from robust work within the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus to create institutional support and readiness for an engaged scholarship (e.g., Barajas & Martin, 2016; Maruyama et al., 2009).

Action and Participatory Research

Another branch of engaged scholarship calls for a more disruptive reenvisioning of higher education's role in society by focusing on social justice, equity, and power redistribution (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Fazey et al., 2020; Sandwick et al., 2018; Stoecker, 2008). Here, participatory knowledge creation goes well beyond academia's institutional needs, advocating for an emancipatory methodology rooted in principles of liberation (e.g., Freire, 1970/2010). Fazey et al. (2020) argued that "action is urgently needed to ensure our knowledge systems become a much more creative force in supporting the continuation of life on our planet" (p. 15).

Scholars of action and participatory research center validity claims in action and contextual meaning. Critical epistemologies in the participatory action framework for research focus on knowledge as action (e.g., Greenwood, 2008) and the ways in which modern science is grounded in exploitation and colonization (Smith, 2012). These approaches to knowledge disrupt the Cartesian logic of duality to recognize multiple ways of knowing (Bradbury, 2015; Stringer, 2014; Warren et al., 2018). Of course, research methods used within any specific project should reflect the appropriate level of rigor needed to answer coconstructed questions sufficiently.

In the introduction to *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*, Bradbury (2015) referred to the "alphabet soup" as a "family" of transformational approaches to inquiry that "manifests the fundamental values and innovations that constitute our evolving community" (p. 4). Youth-focused action

and participatory research are under an umbrella encompassing a proliferation of acronyms and approaches to engaged research, such as community-based participatory research, action research, and youth participatory action research.

Participatory and action research require deep and ongoing connections with community partners beyond a transactional, monetary exchange as an incentive for information. They necessitate trust-building, inclusion, democratization, decolonization, commitment, and valuation of the knowledge and expertise in lived experience (Beaulieu et al., 2018; Bradbury, 2015; Martin, 2013; Smith, 2012). These principles are especially true in knowledge creation with young people and marginalized populations. There are valid reasons why many young people, specifically BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth, may not trust adults or researchers. Mistrust may be due to experiences of criminalization, institutionalization, historical trauma, loss of autonomy, stigmatization, racism, microaggressions, and more (Fehrenbacher et al., 2020; Melander et al., 2019; Musto, 2016).

Anyon et al. (2018) and Shamrova and Cummings (2017) described how involving youth in action research promotes youth empowerment, leadership development, and youth engagement. Youth and young people are online, which shapes their sense of self (Coyne et al., 2013). A small (but growing) body of work suggests that it is possible to meaningfully engage youth online (Bowen et al., 2017), especially when showing respect for online youth culture. Although engaging youth in research presents numerous challenges (Hawke et al., 2020), we draw from the literature on youth engagement (Anyon et al., 2018) and the teachings of youth researchers themselves as necessary and foundational for cocreating research with youth (Rombalski, 2020; Young Women's Empowerment Project, 2009). Although community-based and action research are gaining traction among academic gatekeepers such as tenure committees, peer-reviewed journals, and competitive research grant funders, more change is needed to make this field genuinely inclusive of youth.

What We Did and What We Learned

Project Overview

The MYST Project is a mixed-methods, participatory action research project conducted by a multidisciplinary, intergenerational team. The catalyst for this work was the addition of a new question to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS; https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/health/mss/) administered to ninth and 11th graders: "Have you traded sex or sexual activity to receive money, food, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, or anything else?" The MSS is a triennial population-based survey administered in Grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 in schools and other settings to assess risk and protective factors. Results from the MYST team's analysis of the data have set a scientifically established baseline for Minnesota's response to youth sexual exploitation (Martin et al., 2021).

This work is necessary because the field lacks a clear understanding of the prevalence, scope, scale, correlates, and causes of sex trading among youth. Sex trading is a clandestine activity that is often stigmatized, criminalized, and dangerous, and is thus challenging to research (Cwikel & Hoben, 2005; Gerassi et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2014). The large sample size and breadth of the MSS population-based survey provide an unprecedented window into the experiences of youth who trade sex.

The goal of the MYST Project is to guide future sexual exploitation prevention and intervention work across Minnesota, building on young people's assets, strengths, and protective factors. This research is not for inquiry's sake alone; its goal is to spur and support action in practice. Data and findings from this project will help ensure that Minnesota invests in evidence-based resources that are tailored for communities that need it the most. The project team partners and works with a wide range of organizations (e.g., governmental, nonprofits, coalitions) and individual stakeholders to cocreate the project, share findings, and develop prevention strategies based on the data.

The research combines quantitative analysis of data from the 2019 MSS with qualitative data gathered from key stakeholders and communities most impacted by sexual exploitation (e.g., youth and young people). The MYST Project uses community-engaged and action research approaches to ensure that the results are based on the assets and lived experiences of youth, their communities, and agencies working to prevent exploitation. The design was based

on our team's extensive experience doing community-based research on sex trading, exploitation, and trafficking (e.g., Fogel et al., 2016; Martin, 2015; Martin et al., 2018; Melander et al., 2019).

Originally, the MYST Project intended to travel across the state to connect with youth and adults to understand better how geography (such as rural, urban, suburban, and tribal nations), race/ethnicity, gender, and other factors intersect with youth trading sex. These plans included meeting youth with lived experience in the places they frequent (e.g., libraries, shelters) in partnership with youth-serving agencies. However, the COVID-19 pandemic radically disrupted our original plans for community engagement. We had to rapidly change our outreach methods and retool for an entirely virtual project.

Our mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods both sequentially and concurrently (Cresswell et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2007) to include stakeholder voices at every step of the project. The MYST Project first conducted an initial rough-cut quantitative analysis of the MSS. We shared this broadly with stakeholders through statewide and national presentations (N = 9) and one-on-one meetings (N = <10) to get initial feedback on project direction. Then, we fielded a statewide online survey (N = 131) to identify data needs and priorities for stakeholders. The findings of this survey informed our plans for deep-dive quantitative research. Following that survey, we created, developed, and implemented new research methodologies for online focus groups and conducted six virtual sessions with a specific group of stakeholders, licensed school nurses, over the summer of 2020. The MYST Project gathered compelling data regarding potential strategies for youth sex trading prevention and early intervention from licensed school nurses and plans to use this protocol to collect data from other stakeholders as well.

Finally, as youth voice is a crucial value and method in this project, we also developed and launched a team to virtually engage with youth. This team is connecting with youth to help guide quantitative analysis and surface prevention and intervention ideas directly from young people themselves. That work of incorporating youth voice is currently in the data collection phase and is described in depth below.

Youth Researchers' Voice: @themystproject

Faculty leaders on the MYST Project invested in Millennial and Generation Z researchers to lead, strategize, and create methods to engage youth online. This investment was a deliberate strategy to ground the work in young people's expertise through a virtual engagement team (VET). The VET works within a broader, intergenerational structure of collaboration with experienced, engaged researchers. Mentorship on research methods and institutional review board (IRB) matters combined with support in troubleshooting actualizes the full potential of the VET to meaningfully engage with and learn from young people online. This structure fosters the future of engagement and the next generation of leading engaged scholars. The relationships between the VET and the other MYST team members are reciprocal. VET guidance and insights are integrated across all of the MYST Project's practices, content, and activities. Young researchers provide nuance and balance for the whole team to ensure that all aspects of the MYST Project center the expertise of youth.

The University of Minnesota instituted strict guidelines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which prohibited in-person engagement (University of Minnesota, 2021). To adhere to this policy change, the VET from the MYST Project created an Instagram account with the handle @themystproject in August 2020. This account is a hub for young people, community members, and stakeholders; the VET curates content for these audiences' interests and needs. This content curation is a precursor to recruiting young people for study and exploration. The handle @themystproject became centrally associated with our *research-brand*. Unlike other forms of branding, a research-brand is not designed to sell a product, but rather is a hybrid of youth digital cultural competency and marketing concepts. It is designed to share our project values and knowledge in ways that foster an authentic connection with stakeholders. Reciprocal engagement of youth in research can then happen in the context of a shared online community, fostered through a research-brand.

Trust-building in social media spaces is based mainly on users evaluating another user's existing content before deciding to support or learn more, usually through "following." Both parties build upon this

parasocial relationship, and if a user aligns with a follower in values or interests, they may establish a sense of familiarity, comfort, support, and trust (Lovari & Materassi, 2020). For example, a user interested in social justice may follow an account that creates content on contemporary social justice discourse. In the case of @themystproject, the VET seeks to build trust based on what we share in our carefully curated posts that focus on sex trading, trafficking, and community well-being. According to marketing practices, we developed a research-brand that community members can decide to trust or uplift based on how we carry ourselves in this virtual space. The VET builds this trust by anticipating what topics community members will be interested in and responding to ongoing feedback.

The research-brand transparently demonstrates our values, vision, and approach through images, videos, words, and links posted on Instagram. The team owes some of its insights and practices to youth activists and youth social media practices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of our research-brand, we model accountability and transparency by clearly displaying information about the MYST Project. This includes information about staff, funders, and emerging research findings. The VET develops content on other topics of interest to youth and our followers, such as critical information about sex trading, trafficking, and exploitation. Additionally, the VET shares trusted community resources, such as where to access nonjudgmental services or local Minnesota events. The team also curates educational resources on related topics such as mental wellness and comprehensive sexuality education. Part of the effort to maintain trust in the virtual space means keeping up with current events. On social media, @themystproject creates messaging with related issues happening in society (see Figure 1) and acknowledges the heavy emotional nature of our account.

Examining how we share this content is crucial to understanding our contribution to the research practices we outline and champion within our theory of VPAR, which we discuss in depth in a later section. By focusing on the accessibility of our content, we deepened our trust-building efforts and demonstrated that we value inclusion. The VET uses clear, descriptive language to increase accessibility of written content, pictures, and videos. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the VET's approach. For example, Figure 2 displays the straightforward language used to describe *consent*—a topic widely misunderstood by the general public and young people. Figure 3 shows an Instagram post designed to provide a clear description of PAR to empower the community with an accessible understanding of our work. We also created a Linktree where users can easily access community resources and resources for youth trading sex. This Linktree has become a hub for accessible long-form distribution of project information and a directory for resources (see Figure 4).

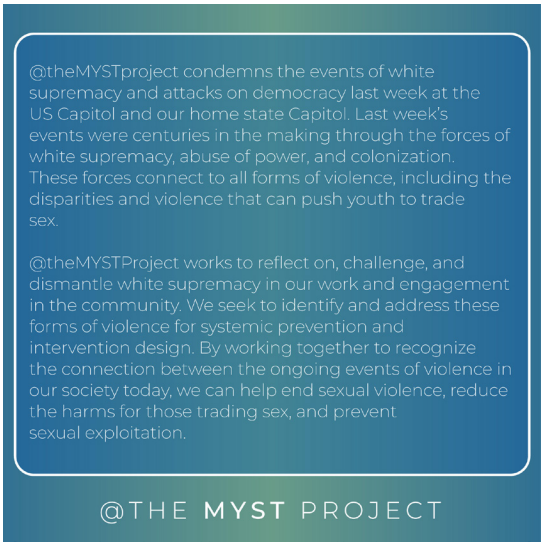

Figure 1. @themystproject Post on Attacks on the U.S. and Minnesota Capitols
Note. This image was created by our team and can be found on Instagram.

Figure 2. @themystproject Post on Consent
Note. This image was created by our team and can be found on Instagram.

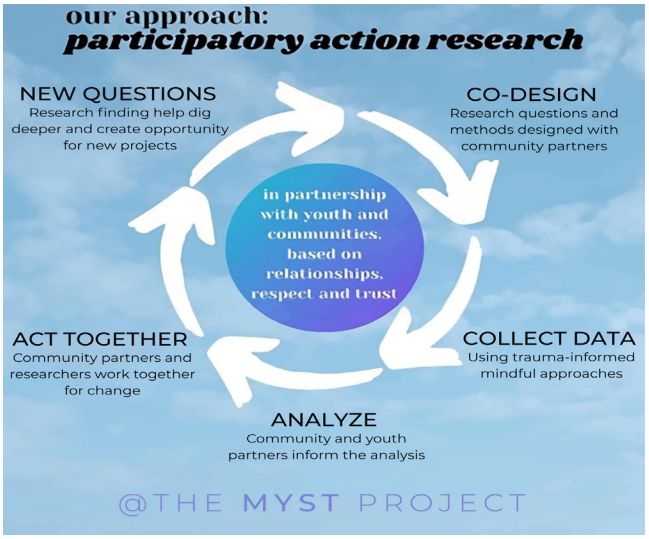

Figure 3. @themystproject Post on Participatory Action Research
Note. This image was created by our team and can be found on Instagram.

Next, creating a world with accessibility for people with disabilities has often been conceptualized in a physical sense. Our team recognizes the need to have and advocate for accessibility in the virtual realm. Therefore, we create visually accessible designs that include gradients and contrast for those with different sight abilities and to add retention to visual learning. Each post has a written description of the image in the caption or comment sections. Each video has closed captioning. Accessible information is typically an afterthought in electronic materials produced by institutions and organizations (Youngblood et al., 2018). Our work has found that accessibility improves our engagement and is critical to fostering all people's trust on the internet.

The VET has begun recruiting youth with lived experience through the @themystproject Instagram account. Recruitment started with a soft launch to gauge how youth would respond. Then, the VET carefully added paid promotions of recruitment posts to track and document how these different functions within Instagram impacted the pace of recruitment. Prior to recruitment it was imperative to first establish the project and create a reciprocal relationship by

Figure 4. @themystproject Linktree
Note. This Linktree was created by our team and can be found on Instagram.

developing our research-brand. Apart from this, the team takes its time to assess and document its practices as it disseminates content. These recursive and adaptable research methodologies ensure the consistent success of the project.

The way in which @themystproject has portrayed a research-brand builds deeply into setting the foundation to uplift youth voice in the research process. Trust, transparency, and accessibility are key to building a social media brand that has a unique focus of research. The initial purpose for @themystproject was recruitment and dissemination of research. However, through practice we have learned that the research-brand approach allows us to truly engage with youth in a meaningful way beyond research to build community, shared values, and knowledge.

Virtual Space: @themystproject

Instagram is our primary virtual engagement venue. It is the platform our engagement team had the most expertise in using and was most suited for our specific functions of trust-building and recruitment. Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing social media platform launched in 2010 that now dominates young people's social media diet (HubSpot, n.d.). Young people shape this venue, as youth represent the user majority across many prominent social media platforms (Barnhart, 2021). Instagram has relatively few limitations on content creation, as a single post can include up to 10 images and has a generous limit of 2,200 characters (HubSpot, n.d.). For written content exceeding 2,200 characters, continued written content can be shared in the comments section of the post.

According to its culture of use, users utilize

Instagram primarily to curate cheerful, aestheticized, or glamorous content (Manovich, 2017). For example, a user may highlight successes in personal or professional milestones through stylish pictures, sharing stories with a generally inspiring or positive tone. This aligns with the MYST Project's emphasis on strengths- and assets-based approaches and its cultural use by young people, as we use the platform to highlight the often overlooked strengths, passions, hopes, and dreams of youth who trade sex. Instagram is an appropriate vehicle for conducting engagement and recruitment activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The VET will soon start engaging with Twitter to drive traffic to @themystproject on Instagram. Although Instagram may still be most suitable for long-form posts, it is important to utilize the fast-paced, temporal nature of Twitter to complement our engagement strategies. Twitter is a microblogging social media platform launched in 2006 that distinguishes itself from other platforms through its culture of brevity, spontaneity, and its sometimes frantic and vitriolic communication and commentary style. This social media platform boasts more than 330 million users worldwide, and users often produce Dadaist-style visual content and 280-character-long written statements (Twitter, n.d.). Twitter's unique quality is its innovative tagging and search capabilities that quickly produce social media trends. These trends range from inconsequential topics such as comedic memes to serious social justice issues such as #BlackLivesMatter and the #MeToo movement. Twitter's user culture positions the platform as a prime place for the more discussion-heavy and time-sensitive aspects of our outreach and engagement strategy (Schnitzler et al., 2016).

Documenting and Measuring Outcomes of VPAR

As is customary with action and participatory research, the process of project design, launch, and engagement is iterative and emergent (Stringer, 2014). This kind of iterative learning and development requires strong documentation of the work and the ability to measure impact in real time as the project is being developed and implemented (Holland, 2009). The goals for the VET at its inception were formative and experimental. We sought information to help us develop and refine the virtual strategy, track and document the quantity and quality of engagement from specific tactics, and use this information as a feedback loop. Desired outcomes were identified to help us translate the work into tangible recruitment outcomes that will be implemented in full during the next project phase. The VET uses both quantitative metrics and qualitative inquiry to guide implementation and track progress toward our engagement goals. In addition to typical research and evaluation methods for tracking engagement, social media tools themselves offer a wide variety of means for this through engagement metrics.

Marketing Tools

The VET utilizes marketing metrics to measure and document virtual engagement outcomes. In digital marketing, *engagement* is an umbrella term for how a user or audience interacts with a brand's content in terms of actions such as clicks, likes, or shares (Montells, 2019). Digital marketers differentiate between clicks that lead to desired actions or behaviors and all other actions or behaviors; this is referred to as *conversion marketing.* This approach examines the conversion rate between the created content and the desired outcome. In typical business marketing, *conversion* refers to whether a user clicks on paid content with product advertisements and whether there is a sale. Higher education engagement efforts can adapt conversion rates to measure desired outcomes of engaged research, such as how many people completed a survey or attended a virtual event.

Engagement is measured through *insights,* which offer quantitative perspectives on how effective engagement is. Insight metrics include (1) *reach*—the number of users who viewed any one piece of created content—and (2) *impressions*—the number of times any single piece of content reached a user. Thus, if a user views a single post more than once, multiple impressions are counted (HubSpot, n.d.). Analyzing reach and impressions allows us to understand when a post performs better than others in terms of reaching more people. Social media platform algorithms accelerate posts with more reach and impressions to engage even more people. In this way, generating likes, comments, views, and impressions creates more and more reach. Insight metrics offer perspective on levels of user audience engagement with published content.

The dissemination of social media content can proceed organically, propelled by users sharing and elevating the content within their own networks. It can also be accelerated nonorganically, using means such as paid advertisement and paid promotions to increase reach and impressions. Social media platforms allow users to pay a small fee (e.g., $5) to promote a post to a targeted subset of users based on geography, age, and other characteristics. Promoting a post prioritizes its position to the beginning of the feed; the content is more likely to reach the user, and to reach them earlier. If the post isn't receiving adequate engagement, the paid promotions will not yield any deeper engagement. Thus, it is critical to ensure the created content is visually appealing and trustworthy in its first iteration to ensure its success with the intended audience.

Measuring Engagement in @themystproject

For the @themystproject research-brand, the outcome we desire is youth willingness to participate in a study, comment, share content, or visit our Linktree. The connection between content and desired outcome in social media is not static; it is an open-ended relationship that evolves over time. The VET creates engaging content by listening to users, engaging community partners, and learning from conversations with young people in iterative and reciprocal ways. We transform concepts developed for marketing brand strategy to engage young people in our research.

Additionally, the VET gathers and analyzes qualitative data through user feedback. In response to content, people who engage with project posts can offer their feedback and ideas using the comment and messaging features built into the social media platform (e.g., Instagram). Comments help researchers gauge users' interest in particular topics, whatever they may be. These comments provide feedback for shaping future content. Figure 5 provides an example of comments the VET received on an Instagram post expressing gratitude for creating content on a topic. The comments demonstrate that at least some users are developing trust and that they appreciated transparency through talking about issues that are not frequently discussed. Figure 4 was @themystproject's post that was commented on the most. This positive feedback gave us insight that in-depth and well explained posts are popular among our audiences. This helps us build trust with the community for sharing accurate posts on topics they care about.

In October 2020, the VET sought to analyze and compare engagement with specific con-

Figure 5. @themystproject Post on the Intersections of Trading Sex, Sexual Violence, and Chemical Addiction

tent using organic versus nonorganic modes of promoting a post. The VET posted content to our Instagram profile and tracked organic engagement. Then the same content was boosted nonorganically with paid promotion and user demographic targeting to reach our desired audience of youth aged 16–21 living in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Table 1 shows the difference in engagement as measured by Instagram analytics. A small monetary investment increased all engagement outcomes, including how many users saw the post, liked and commented on it, clicked to our Instagram profile, and how many times users saw the post.

In November 2020, the VET piloted recruitment and data collection protocols with youth experts and compensated them to provide feedback on study materials prior to launching. In December 2020, the VET posted study recruitment content using only organic means of promotion. We sought to recruit youth aged 16–21 who were knowledgeable about or had lived experience with trading sex. From this single recruitment post, 24 young people viewed the study in the survey platform in Qualtrics, and 17 youth consented to participate in either a survey or an interview. Of those who consented, eight were 16–17 years old, six were 18–19 years old, and one was 21 years old. Two individuals indicated they were not in the study age range and were ineligible to participate. Based on these participants' experiences and survey/interview responses, the VET revised the survey and semistructured interview protocol. The VET recently relaunched study recruitment using paid promotions, but does not yet have engagement results.

As of April 2021, the VET posted 78 images and stories, including some trial posts for recruitment. The Instagram profile @themystproject had 522 followers and followed 813 individuals and partners. We averaged approximately 5–10% engagement on posts, meaning that we received likes, comments, or reposts from approximately that number of Instagram profiles in relation to our total followers. Some posts received much higher percentages of engagement. The VET surpassed our initial goals for building a research-brand that attracts followers, and we continue iteratively adapting our engagement strategies.

Discussion: Theorizing VPAR and Its Best Practices

The VET's work surfaced new methods and theories for engaging with youth in the digital era. This section explores new theorizing about the necessity of virtual participatory action research (VPAR) in relation to engagement with youth and young people in research. The hands-on work of constructing the @themystproject research-brand was iteratively interwoven with our emerging theorization about VPAR. Action research is grounded in cycles of action, engagement, and reflection (Bradbury, 2015; Stringer, 2014). We used this new approach to build on our existing knowledge of youth online culture, lessons from the social uprisings and mutual aid movements, and social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work culminated in the novel concept of a research-brand. We suggest that the concept of a research-brand is an effective way to authentically

Table 1. Instagram Metrics for @themystproject

	Advertised Post ($20 for 4 days)	Nonadvertised post
Reach (How many people see the post)	3,316	213
Likes	110 (25% of the total following)	34 (9% of the total following)
Comments	7	0
Profile Visits (Driven to the profile by the post)	36	6
Impressions (How many times someone saw a post)	4,085	283

Note. Data derived from the @themystproject business account on Instagram.

engage youth in alignment with youth online culture. Together these lessons led us to articulate our best practices for youth engagement in VPAR.

To translate effectively to online spaces, researchers should be fluent in online youth cultural practices and communications. Researchers cannot simply move study materials online. When designing and executing community outreach and engagement in the virtual space, it is crucial to understand the complexities of online communication, interaction, and culture production and how virtual space differs from the in-person world. The digital sphere is a cultural venue of its own that interacts with culture production in nonvirtual life and vice versa. It has its own rules for socializing and building interpersonal relationships for individuals (i.e., users) to navigate. Yet many engaged researchers are not integrated with this virtual world of community, or even familiar with it.

Virtual cultural rules and venues are constantly shifting, but these changes were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these adaptations to work and life will remain, such as comfort and familiarity with virtual meetings or working from home. This type of change is not unprecedented, as numerous disability activists and theorists established the groundwork of social accessibility and accommodation, including through devices and the internet. Likewise, social uprisings such as those in Minnesota have illuminated the future of U.S. race relations, alternatives to policing, and community solidarity that cannot be undone. Youth have been at the forefront of social change movements while simultaneously being sidelined and made invisible in these movements (Middaugh et al., 2017). As youth use social media to participate in social uprisings, whether in person or virtually, many are wary of the ways they are surveilled and seek to mitigate risks through self-censoring and taking conversations offline. Our team has experienced these cultural shifts firsthand. The future of engaged research cannot afford to miss out on the insights and complexities of how COVID-19-related technological advancements and widespread social uprising affects social media use.

In the process of transitioning to VPAR we learned that this approach is not only a useful adaptation to research during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also potentially helps us reach youth who may be left behind by in-person engagement. For example, the VET can connect with our online community to raise consciousness about sex trading and thus can potentially reach youth who did not previously identify themselves as having traded sex. Further, VPAR is a tool for engaging with youth who are geographically isolated or disconnected from resources and services. Youth who are surveilled, profiled, or stigmatized may prefer the anonymity that VPAR offers. Finally, many young people who are neither in school nor seeking services are harder to reach by in-person engagement but are online and can be reached through VPAR. Table 2 shows the expansive reach of VPAR and how it can uplift the voice of youth who may have been unintentionally silenced with traditional practices.

We hybridized engaged research principles and digital marketing skills to tailor our engagement efforts. Taking the research-brand approach can directly benefit the future of the project's social media account reach, partnerships, future funding, and study results. Online youth culture shows that trust can be built on social media when providing relevant content and spending time developing relationships, as is often practiced in branding. We built trust with youth by posting content on topics and values youth care about, in visually accessible and engaging formats, with plain, easy-to-understand language that mirrors the ways youth communicate. We used social media insights on engagement by utilizing qualitative and quantitative feedback alike through communicative and noncommunicative actions. Young researchers on our team integrated these lenses and tools into the MYST Project to build an online community that shares resources and knowledge, as well as engaging and recruiting young people in research. This novel VPAR approach builds on theory from existing PAR proliferations on how to adapt the value of cultural competency to the online space in the digital age. This theory takes wisdom gained from the COVID-19 era to shape the future of engaged research.

Lessons Learned

In the process of shifting methodology to the virtual world, the MYST Project identified three principles instrumental to successful VPAR. These principles are the pillars of our work, and we recommend these as best practices for researchers looking

Table 2. Youth for Whom In-Person Engagement May Not Be Effective	
Youth who do not self-identify as trading sex	Because of societal misconceptions, trauma responses, or lack of exposure to education on the topic, some youth who trade sex may not self-identify as participants of the activity. This designation includes trading sex, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and survival sex.
Isolated youth	Many youth who trade sex are geographically isolated, often by their traffickers or individuals who have power over them. They could be geographically far away from the project's location or geographically isolated from community service providers. They could also be unable to leave or travel due to a lack of access to transportation.
Disconnected youth	Youth who are disconnected from youth-oriented and community supports (or currently on waiting lists and not yet connected). They can be missed when working with community-based partners and can be hard to contact in person.
Surveilled youth	Youth who have a person (such as a guardian or trafficker) watching where they go and whom they talk with in person who cannot participate in research, services, or supports. This group also includes youth who are oversurveilled by the police and may distrust institutions and research.
Youth out of school	Youth who are not in school—due to school push-out, truancy, bullying, physical or mental challenges, family crisis, or lack of resources—may be more isolated.
Youth lacking accessibility	Youth who face barriers to accessing in-person engagement methods based on their disabilities. Barriers can include physical inaccessibility (i.e., lack of ramps, elevators, curb cuts outside the building, light/auditory accommodations), lack of a sign language interpreter, or reliance on a guardian/caretaker.

to engage young people online to promote systemic change.

1. Hire Young People to Devise and Implement VPAR

The foundation of PAR relies on the unique strengths brought together by researchers and community members during the research process. Partnership develops from engaging with those who would typically be the "subjects" of the research topic or project (Stringer, 2014). Employing young people to lead VPAR efforts brings the expertise of youth to the fore. This staffing model centers the research's potential subjects and builds on the knowledge of those most familiar with youth-centered online culture. Youth researchers are best positioned to curate content so it is culturally and socially relevant to the targeted audience of youth. Young people can engage effectively with other young people (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Hiring young people who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and youth with particular lived experiences relevant to research aims can significantly increase accessibility and trust with an online audience who share these identities. These team members have expertise in the real-life strengths and complexities that can arise within the research. For some young researchers with marginalized identities, engaging with youth who share identities or experiences with them can be an empowering experience. It may help them process or heal from pain or trauma by knowing they positively impact others who share in their lived realities (Corbett, 2018). On the other hand, it is crucial to consider that these researchers may experience unwanted physical, mental, or emotional effects. For example, someone with lived experience in trading sex may relive trauma while reviewing survey re-

sponses discussing that topic. Giving young investigators time, space, and support to engage with their emotions and experiences is vital within this practice. Participation from youth with lived experience requires commitment and support from senior researchers to safely, ethically, and meaningfully engage younger researchers with lived experiences (Cody & D'Arcy, 2019). These relationships are mutually beneficial. Senior researchers can transfer knowledge of existing research methods, and young researchers can develop, adapt, and advance methods to adjust with current trends and societal change in order to improve future research.

The purpose of PAR is to support benefits and autonomy to communities by implementing changes in research practices that better align the research and its subsequent findings with the goals and experiences of the population studied. Therefore, our team suggests that higher education should shift power within intergenerational research teams so that young researchers have leadership roles alongside more experienced practitioners. The voices of youth in research create a more authentic online research-brand. Their messages come with language and communication techniques that are often absent from experienced academic investigators' knowledge base. Youth are preconnected to the virtual networks through their familiarity with (and potentially higher user aptitude for) virtual engagement and social media (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). They can influence people within their personal and preestablished virtual networks to engage in the research online.

Our team has a history of using in-person research practices to engage people with lived experience of sexual exploitation, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC communities. Our present research team shares in these identities that are most central to understanding youth who trade sex, and we have youth leaders who identify with a range of lived experience, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC communities, and are from the Millennial and Generation Z generations. These young researchers are leaders of this research and have developed a culturally competent, inclusive, and trauma-informed research approach to addressing youth sex trading.

2. Prioritize Building Trust in Virtual Spaces

Due to the lack of trust during the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent social uprisings, developing trust in a virtual community was a top priority of this project. The MYST Project has recently observed that building trust in the virtual space is difficult and presents unique challenges compared to in-person connection. Social media platform software is designed to generate and circulate mass amounts of information (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). However, not all information on social media is accurate. The rise of "fake news" and abuses of social media during the pandemic have seeded mistrust. Therefore, it is difficult for users to decide what to trust and believe is factual in a virtual space (Lovari & Materassi, 2020).

Developing trust in a virtual space should be prioritized and built meaningfully over time. We established these considerations by actively communicating on social media, creating content with community importance, accessibility, and project transparency. These considerations harness social media tools and research practices to deliver a research-brand that increases trust on social media. We engage with youth voices, distribute information on community resources or services, and educate on topics of youth exploitation. The VET interacts with community members by sharing stories and photos and commenting on related materials. These practices of trust-building were foundational as a lesson learned from our theory on VPAR in a virtual space.

Youth sex trading is an underresearched and sensitive topic. Our previous research has suggested that trust building is uniquely vital when engaging youth who trade sex either in person or online (Gerassi et al., 2017; Martin, 2013, 2015). Without trust, youth are unlikely to disclose that they have traded sex due to shame and fears of rejection or stigma. It is difficult for youth who trade sex and youth from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities to trust those working in this field due to a deep distrust in institutions and often a lack of shared identity with service providers (Melander et al., 2019). This mistrust further applies to research and academic institutions. Trust-building is a central component of participatory action research (Bradbury, 2015); even though it may appear different in online engagement, it is nonetheless equally important.

3. Center Authenticity and Transparency

Any project, organization, government

entity, or service provider working on youth sex trading should strive to create a safe environment, incorporate a trauma-informed approach, and understand the complex experiences of the youth who trade sex (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2016; Lavoie et al., 2019). Youth who experience trading sex typically have other adverse experiences and may have a deep mistrust of other people (Somer & Szwarcberg, 2001). In recognizing these experiences, the MYST Project works to build a positive rapport online by including trauma-informed, wellness-enhancing resources and bringing attention to the experiences of youth who trade sex. Centering authenticity and transparency on social media necessitates the genuine consideration of young people's experiences. For the VET, this was achieved through posting videos and images of the team members running the account, disclosing funders, and defining project goals in accessible terms. This display of transparency provides followers a more personable and clear understanding of @themystproject. We understand that to have a successful VPAR strategy means fostering a genuine connection with social media followers to truly reach the threshold of trust.

Historically, some universities, such as the University of Minnesota, do not have a great rapport with BIPOC communities (Manthey, 2020) or other marginalized communities. Therefore, VPAR offers a way for community member and institution relationships to shift to a more genuine connection where research affiliation is acknowledged to foster authenticity and transparency. For instance, our team has explicitly stated our association with the University of Minnesota. Although our team is not responsible for engagement writ large at the University of Minnesota, we carry the institution with us when we engage. Thus, authenticity and transparency in our actions are even more critical, both to signify the MYST Project values and to build bridges.

Conclusion

This article describes our team's efforts to meaningfully engage with youth who trade sex during the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth are online and the virtual world has its own unique culture and communicative norms. Fluency in online culture will help our engagement efforts fully meet youth where they are in virtual spaces. Further, knowledge and understanding of how youth use social media for activism and social justice work also provided insights about the particular need for authenticity, trust, and transparency in our research-brand. The pandemic spurred us to develop a novel virtual participatory action research (VPAR) approach that offers valuable principles and practices for online engagement. Specifically, we created an Instagram account @themystproject to serve as a project hub to reach youth, build community with them, and invite them to address the complex social issues and phenomena related to youth trading sex through knowledge cocreation.

Our team's history of community-based participatory research helped us draw from the established engagement toolkit and transform it into a strategy that can be intentionally implemented in a virtual format. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated that society can function online when necessary, but existing online tools have yet to be fully integrated into engaged research practices. By hiring young people, taking time to build trust, and translating the principles of authenticity and transparency to the virtual world, we developed a novel and promising approach to the engaged research process. We do not anticipate that virtual engagement will entirely replace in-person connection with youth. Rather, we envision eventually interweaving these modes of engagement. The pandemic taught us that VPAR can and should become a mainstay of engagement efforts in higher education if we want to more meaningfully engage with youth and other marginalized groups in research.

Authors' Conflict of Interest Note

We have no known conflict of interest.

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"Plan for the Worst, Hope for the Best, but Realistically, Expect a Combination of Both": Lessons and Best Practices Emerging From Community-Engaged Teaching During a Health Crisis

Angie Mejia

Abstract

This article outlines a framework that I implemented when delivering a community-engaged course during the earlier days of COVID-19. I argue that these guiding principles—centering the community partners' needs, assessing and remaining flexible to students' circumstances, and cautiously mapping and selectively using institutional resources to deliver the course—allowed me to provide a community-engaged experience to undergraduate students despite pandemic restrictions. At the same time, I ensured that the intersectional feminist and critical ethos of the class was not compromised and that the commitment to the community partners' sustainability was not cast aside. Additionally, I share two detailed exemplars of community-based learning projects highlighting the possibilities, challenges, and limitations when applying this framework. I close this piece with several points of departure to stimulate future conversation among educators, researchers, and practitioners on the role of community-based service-learning during times of societal crisis.

Keywords: critical community-engaged learning, centering the partnerships, student-centered, pandemic teaching

This article's title was inspired by a phrase I used as a sign-off for emails to colleagues teaching community-engaged classes like the one I teach. These emails, housed on a subfolder aptly named "Pandemic Teaching," were answered at a particularly unproductive and uncreative time of the workweek. We, the privileged few with time to organize our files, might also have had the time to answer such crisis emails from other colleagues teaching community-engaged courses. "What do you think of . . . ?" "So, when the IRB took too long to respond, what did you . . ." "My dean wants to know if my class . . ." "My students are ghosting me . . ." "I'm losing my mind trying to figure out how the students will complete . . ." "My community agency partnership has not responded since the stay-at-home order."

Like me, my colleagues expressed frustration about the lack of direction and support amid what appeared to be a sizable number of resources from our institutions and organizational bodies dedicated to supporting community-engaged pedagogy (broadly defined to include out-of-class community activities encompassing service-learning advocacy and social justice offerings). I took this a step further and decided to write a venting letter to myself. First, airing out frustrations was my way to cope; later, it became a way to connect with others in a similar situation. I eventually toned down the letter and published it as an article titled "Community-Engaged Learning in Times of COVID-19, or, Why I'm Not Prepared to Transition My Class Into an

Online Environment" (Mejia, 2020). These emails and conversations with readers of the earlier article inspired me to document how I restructured a community-engaged course, which is intentional in its intersectional feminist pedagogy and antioppressive praxis, in response to pandemic difficulties.

The following sections outline practices and lessons learned via two exemplars implemented to restructure a community-based learning undergraduate course at the University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR), a health and medical sciences campus, in response to the COVID-19 stay-at-home mandate. In addition to the support of faculty and staff, I owe my ability to deliver a class that supported 10 community-partnered projects and over 50 students to following three guiding and connected principles: centering, assessing, and mapping. At the start of the pandemic, our immediate response as instructors was to *center the needs of our community partners and the community members they serve*—what Grenier et al. (2020) referred to as "anchoring the partnership" (p. 4)—instead of finding ways to meet the learning objectives of the class. This act of anchoring the community partnerships was followed by coordinated and persistent efforts to *assess and remain attuned closely to our students' needs during the first weeks of the pandemic.* Finally, these first two elements meant having to *map and selectively and strategically choose which existing institutional resources* were needed to support the delivery of a community-engaged course while simultaneously creatively using the supports and strategies of noninstitutional sources. These approaches went against what I felt was higher education's need to "meet learning objectives" of our community-based learning initiatives without regard to the partners and organizational bodies facilitating this experience. Reflecting on this framework and the two exemplars that follow it shows the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of offering critical community-engaged courses in light of COVID-19 and similar sociopolitical crises.

Challenges were encountered when delivering this course and supporting community-based projects that comprised the bulk of the partnership connected to a small campus within a more extensive university system. COVID-19 made the adverse effects of higher education's institutionalization of community-engaged learning more visible. Showing the cracks made it much easier to create workarounds and deliver my class without compromising its intersectional feminist praxis. My campus and the state university system it belongs to, like many of those U.S. institutions of higher education that engage in service to the community, was and continues to operate under the influence of what Verjee (2010) called the "status-quo paradigm," a model in which "students . . . help people 'in need,' and 'do for the community' while enhancing their own learning, with an emphasis on the student as 'server' and community recipient as 'served'" (p. 7). Practices under this paradigm are not only responsible for causing "a drain on community agencies' limited resources" (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p. 127) in that the labor of community partnerships tends to benefit students and the university more than the members they serve. More often than not, they cause further harm and solidify the inequities they seek to address. Faculty and other groups engaged in community-based learning offerings that are antioppressive, social-justice-based, and critically transformative are forced to navigate against institutional constraints to nurture and maintain relationships with communities that are not based on asymmetrical power dynamics.

After introducing the campus, my course's learning objectives, and community-based research projects connected to my class, I expand on how the above-noted framework guided my revision and delivery of a connected set of practices that educators could replicate in a similar moment of crisis. The Exemplars section focuses on exemplars of two community-engaged activities that I developed for my students during the pandemic, one of which worked well and, at the time of writing, continues to operate as described. Another may have initially appeared to work but, despite the efforts, does not appear to be sustainable. Following the Exemplars section, I engage in a reflective detour geared to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) scholars working on community-engaged learning initiatives before closing with some thoughts on how academics, practitioners, and advocates can move forward with community-engaged learning efforts that uplift as well as empower communities.

Context

UMR is the smallest of a group of campuses

that make up the University of Minnesota public university system. Serving around 600 students, UMR is known for providing a curriculum focused on the health and medical sciences, its connection to the Mayo Clinic, and faculty members' approach to innovative pedagogies. As an assistant professor of community engagement, I am responsible for developing, advising others on, and delivering community-based service-learning courses that pair groups of students with community partners implementing projects that range from direct-service engagement on site to research conducted on behalf of a community agency.

This text focuses on lessons learned from the rapid pandemic restructuring of one of these courses, Community Collaborative, geared to undergraduates. Community Collaborative is intentional in its intersectional feminist and critical approach to community engagement. It challenges students to critically engage with individuals and groups to understand, map out, and target unjust conditions that have disallowed communities from sustaining healthy and just futures. The critical feminist pedagogical moves (Costa & Leong, 2012; Diaz, 2016; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) that I have integrated into the curriculum include citational practices that center material authored by women of color scholars (around 80%) and three full sessions dedicated to intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1991) and intersectional analysis (Collins, 2002) as they pertain to issues students are encountering in the community.

The class is delivered with six other instructors who guide groups of five to eight students, coordinate community projects, assess student progress throughout the semester, and liaise directly with community partner representatives. Community partners often meet with us to see how students can help deliver projects or engage in activities that meet their clients' needs. Community partners also assess student progress by supervising on-site activities and evaluating final presentations; their total contribution nets around 20% of the final grade. At one time, the course partnered with 11 agencies and had seven faculty members in charge of a total of 50 students. In fall 2020, we had seven projects, five faculty members, and 40 students. In spring 2021, we have 50 students supporting five community partners and two in-house projects. The class is also offered during the summer, with fewer students supporting one to two partners.

Three Steps to Pandemic Teaching

As Flores et al. (2020) reflected on their transitioning of a community-immersed class during the earlier days of the pandemic, "Abandoning . . . partners at the onset of a public health emergency would have been antithetical to the core values promulgated by the course" (p. 47). My experience and insights from many conversations with educators and practitioners delivering community-engaged learning indicate that the resources and strategies made available via our universities and institutional bodies that support experiential, service-learning, and other community-based learning revolved around that transactional paradigm of the university student as someone who expects that this opportunity serving the community should meet their needs as an educational consumer. Being asked to focus on the learning outcomes of a class without community centering, and in doing so, leaving community needs as an afterthought, not only shows how we are being asked to abandon our partners in a time of crisis but also how we had to pressure them to come up with ways to help us deliver this experiential aspect of our class. Thus, the three guiding principles (and the exemplars) outlined in the following sections should be taken as one way some faculty and practitioners might respond and resist the neoliberalization (Clifford, 2017) of campus–community-based learning.

Center the Partnership and the Communities Partners Serve

Lessons learned from health education service-learning practices (Flores et al., 2020) and community-engaged research (Wieland et al., 2020) during COVID-19 suggest that immediate and continuous response to partnership needs—avoiding delays and waiting periods to initiate partner contact—might prevent disparities in communities and ensure commitment to the partnership. This response is vital, as organizations might view community–campus learning initiatives as "an imposition and insensitive to community needs" (Verjee, 2010, p. 8). In addition, meeting "the short and longer-term needs of the host community should be the first and most important consideration" (Beaman & Davidson, 2020, p. 3607) when seeking to deliver a community-engaged

curriculum during times of rapid change. Thus, my initial energies went toward a rapid assessment of where my partners were at and how I could be of assistance, even if my help meant asking students to cease any off-site project-based tasks, such as telephone surveys, or if it meant getting my students and myself out of the community partners' hair altogether. Flores et al.'s (2020) recollections of teaching a community-engaged course highlighted how faculty members' ability to "freely verbalize . . . mutual feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability about current events" (p. 48) with community partners showed the strength of ongoing relationships founded on reciprocity and mutual respect.

My ability to quickly assess community partners' needs was aided by the strength of the relationships forged between them and the past and current instructors teaching this course. Thus, most of the partnering organizations were not shy about saying that my students and I would be more of a burden than a boon. In sum, my emails and calls to each partner were more along the lines of asking what I could do, not as a faculty member with students that needed something to do, but as someone connected to a university system with different forms of intellectual and organizational capital. During these conversations with partners, I quickly learned whether they were going on furlough status—temporarily ceasing on-site operations—ceasing operations altogether, or shifting agency operations to answer critical needs arising from COVID-19. One of our campus's partners, a social service agency serving older adults, had to move from its usual operations like a senior health fair, social outings, and hosting bingo nights to emergency-based services, including delivery of groceries for homebound seniors and similar immediate needs. After contacting each partner, often with assistance from coinstructors, I understood what to do with each of the students' groups in light of experiential activities.

Assess Students' Needs

As Veyvoda and Van Cleave (2020) indicated, "the most pressing concerns related to teaching and learning during the pandemic involv[e] basic needs" (p. 1544) of students as well as of staff. Knowing that some students had a few weeks to move out of student housing and try to take care of other needs beyond academics, I was honest with my partners about some not being able to continue working with their agencies. However, knowing that many of my students do entry-level healthcare work or are in health-related internships, I also informed the partner that those staying and still willing to do community work would need to coordinate changing schedules. The students would also face increased hours at their respective workplaces, making it more challenging to complete the partner's assigned duties and project tasks. I also was upfront about the risks involved if we could get the necessary permissions from my university to maintain students working on-site. Since our undergraduates are being trained as healthcare professionals, they understand the ins and outs of disease transmission. However, their employment situations as healthcare workers would still make them more susceptible to contracting COVID-19.

The pandemic's effect on students' lives should be immediately addressed by instructors and integrated into the curriculum. Flores et al. (2020), for example, related course concepts like social determinants of health to students' current difficulties as well as emphasizing "how these same issues may be manifesting for the most vulnerable members in their home communities" (p. 49). Other educators see the incorporation of COVID-19 on reflective exercises and assignments as a pedagogical move that helps students create new links to the material while addressing their well-being during rapid change (Christian et al., 2020). Part of taking the pulse of students' needs was to have conversations about how the pandemic affected their academic lives. Some of these conversations were conducted with an eye to what was needed for graduation for those nearing it. Is a grade in a non-STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) course like this one necessary for your postbaccalaureate goals, or could a pass/no pass substitution suffice? If this class was a way to gain professional experience, for example, would a withdrawal grade satisfy if the students continued working with the partner as a volunteer?

My coinstructors and I also became acutely aware of the students' material and emotional needs as they navigated this transition. A small percentage, especially those with complicated home lives, might have been going back to an unsafe place, which could remove them from the right "head-

space" for engaging with the community partner. Besides, even in emotionally safe environments, students' new living situations may make it difficult for them to complete some service-learning tasks. Students with, say, spotty internet service, would not be able to perform some of the engagement tasks required by the partner. For those collecting data, living with family members may hamper their ability to conduct interviews and surveys with assured participant confidentiality. Taking technological issues into account, I also knew that the rapid shift to heavy dependence on learning management systems (LMS) for classes might further disadvantage those likely to struggle in an online learning environment.

Finally, the pandemic has affected students' overall engagement with my class's partnered projects as of writing this article. Centering the partnership's needs may have the unintended consequence of removing students from projects needed to meet various academic requirements, such as on-site research experiences, or programs that they found engaging, meaningful, or relevant to their future professional trajectories. Some of the community-partnered projects in my fall 2020 classes had to shift once again because of organizational changes related to COVID-19 issues.

Cautiously Strategize the Use of Institutional Resources

Talmage et al. (2020) suggested that rapid changes to community-engaged learning projects need not rely on resources outside the campus or focus on large-scale, nonlocal alternatives to be successful. My initial scramble highlighted how the resources and strategies curated by regional and national higher education associations and service-learning networks would not assist me in anchoring the partnership or staying in line with the critical frameworks and antioppressive praxis during the rapid pivot of a community-engaged course.

Maybe I was naïve, but I felt slight irritation when I realized that my faculty partners and I, at least on our campus, were the only ones actively trying to find ways to assist struggling community partners during the earlier weeks of the pandemic. Administration and staff might have been too busy, as my emails came back with only vague statements of support. And from my vantage point, the office and staff that administers community-engaged and experiential learning at the systemwide university level were likely already overwhelmed by faculty requests from other campuses needing resources to shift to online-based service-learning courses. Without denying that these institutional supports might have been helpful to some, I found that finding ways to "keep teaching" and meeting the learning objectives without practical and actionable solutions or readily available resources to help our community partners felt one-sided. Besides, it felt antithetical to the maintenance of reciprocal and transformative relationships between community and campus and the intersectional feminist foundations of my curriculum.

After a day spent in utter frustration, I sought ways to maintain my class's critical stance by creatively using resources from the margins: for example, tapping into my activist networks for ideas and plans to deliver portions of my class online; changing some of the reading materials to more manageable formats such as blogs, podcasts, or social media focusing on COVID-19; and centering the needs of the partners while strategizing ways to use some institutional resources that were not directly connected to my course's learning outcomes. Below, I sketch out some of these strategically cautious uses of institutional resources to show how instructors might provide a community-engaged class without decentering the community partner's needs or failing to meet learning objectives.

Help From Displaced Staff Members Within the University

I was lucky that my class is structured to be a collaborative endeavor. Each group of students has an individual faculty advisor to oversee the work and coordinate projects for one of the 10 community partners. This support gave me a bit of a breather, as I was able to assess all of my community partners' organizational capacities and willingness to continue to support students. At the same time, faculty advisors could meet individually with students to learn about their specific situations. If I had been without their support, I would most likely have turned to my university's systemwide Talent Share program. It temporarily matches staff members across the university who are experiencing a decrease in workload due to the pandemic with other divisions and campuses experiencing increased workloads for the same reason.

Supporting and overseeing my students as they conducted online-based tasks for a partner, for instance, would have been very well supported by other staff members—even other undergraduates—displaced from their usual duties. Uprooted graduate students, for example, could have used their library skills to supervise student groups helping partners applying for emergency grants. Laboratory staff could have been able to help with logistical support of ongoing projects.

Tapping Into COVID-19-Specific Responses by the University

Are there COVID-19-specific responses that could be leveraged to anchor the partnership or meet students' needs? The 2nd week of the pandemic, I was connected to the university system's U-CAN COVID-19 network, a self-described collective of faculty, staff, and students tasked with figuring out how to support state, regional, and citywide efforts around the pandemic. Although the resources provided by U-CAN would not have helped me determine how to deliver the community-engaged portion of my course, they answered my community partners' immediate needs for volunteers with specialized skills such as grant writing and emergency fundraising. For example, the group connected one of my partners, a community garden serving refugee and minority growers, with two doctoral candidates to coordinate a long-term strategy for the increase of people seeking community garden plots during the crisis. The network also offered to connect another of my partners with volunteers well experienced in coordinating fast turnaround/large-scale emergency fundraising initiatives of in-kind and monetary donations. Organizing an appeal of that scope was outside my and my faculty partners' experience; my students would not have been able to undertake it without the direction of someone with specialized skills and training.

Seeking In-House Projects

Most of the community partners could not continue the project at all, either because they furloughed all of their staff or did not have the organizational capacity to support student engagement at a distance. Are there colleagues, departments, units, groups, and the like doing work that aligns with your community-engaged class's intellectual and political foundations? The Mapping Prejudice project, a digital humanities program at one of the campuses within my university's system, would have been on my list of possible in-house partners. This program uses crowdsourced volunteers to transcribe restrictive racial housing property covenants in Minneapolis and could have provided my students with the type of community-engaged learning opportunity that met the objectives of my course while online.

Exemplars

Considering the way my class was set up, the context, the levels of support, and the time available, I offer two vignettes showing both successful and not-so-successful outcomes of using this framework to substitute the original community work. These exemplars apply not only to project substitutions that occurred at the start of the pandemic but also current—as of writing this article—insights from my coteaching colleagues and reflections from the students. Centering the partnership, assessing students' needs, and cautiously mapping institutional resources, in some cases, might allow community-engaged learning initiatives to remain useful, meaningful, and relevant to the communities, students, and faculty/staff involved.

"Using the Telephone Is Going to Make Me Anxious"

One group of students assigned to a social service agency was originally scheduled to conduct individual weekly companionship visits with homebound older adults. They also planned to help with social group activities (such as game nights, community breakfasts, and student-led beauty and wellness spa days) for seniors who visited the agency's day site. Our university's request to cease all experiential learning activities (or substitute them with virtual tasks) placed this agency in a difficult position. Their older clients' health could be compromised if student visits continued, but stopping could leave an already socially disconnected group vulnerable to further isolation. After discussing it via email, the community partner asked that the students move to telephone conversations (twice a week for at least an hour) to retain relationships with their matches. Although the agency's clients had no problem with the calls, students were anxious about the change. Students feared that this would

not have the same impact as face-to-face encounters, and the rapport they had established would suffer. Their anxieties were messaged to me via private Zoom chat, expressing that members of their generation "tend not to answer when cell phones ring" and hoping they did not "mess up the relationship" they had built with their older adult match. After the faculty member overseeing this group and I met with each student to understand their needs due to the pandemic, we felt (even if they initially disagreed) that they were ready to begin phone calls. Three weeks into the distanced visits and agency-directed tasks, most students reported that relationships with their matches remained as strong as before and did not show signs of losing interest or becoming disengaged.

In addition, their reflective journals suggested a sense of shared purpose brought on by a global health crisis. Since the agency had once requested help designing a more community-based project to further incorporate their clients' voices, students began consulting with a colleague who performs archival research. They started to plan for next semester's class to conduct oral history interviews with the older adults. Despite the project's shift to online, students agreed that the course's meaningfulness was retained and that preparing the oral history proposal further enriched their learning. As of now, any student activities connected to this agency (which involve telephone conversations with seniors and research-based tasks) will continue to adhere to social distancing protocols for the protection of the immunosuppressed clientele. Furthermore, the groundwork has been laid so that future students can conduct the oral history interviews the agency has wanted. Tentatively titled Past as Praxis, the project will frame older adults' recollections around previous public health crises as lessons for medical providers envisioning better healthcare futures in light of present uncertainties.

Interestingly, none of the resources that I sought could help me deliver the community-engaged portion that met the social needs of vulnerable individuals in the way that the partner wanted. I found lists upon lists of e-volunteering sites providing some form of Zoom-based contact with nonlocal members. Other suggestions included crowdsourced volunteering opportunities or having the students engage in the partner's back-burner projects, such as creating websites, brochures, or informational binders. Running around looking for busywork would have made more chores for us and brought a dynamic that disengaged the students. For example, how do I track and assess student work on an e-volunteering project? What do I know about their technical skills or their new living situations? And how do the students feel about being pulled away?

The success of this partnered project rested on centering the partners' needs while working with the students to understand if they could continue with their adult matches under shifting circumstances (some had moved back home and found themselves with additional responsibilities) and with different technological set-ups (many faced internet connectivity issues, but cell phone access was a given). The reworked activities remained relevant to the course objectives and written work. I also kept myself from asking to integrate students into emergency volunteer needs: Even with a volunteer coordinator working full time, the agency might not be ready to train them. My faculty colleague and I worked with the partner separately, providing other forms of support (such as finding specialized volunteers, emergency sources of donations, or university-based resources) to assist them with their work.

"Just Get Them to Zoom and [Snaps Fingers] Done"

Some colleagues indicated that their universities provided ideas and resources to shift face-to-face service-learning activities into online ones. The literature suggests that institutional resources have been creatively leveraged to assist community partnerships. For example, institutions have allowed community partners to tap into technological resources (Opara et al., 2020), such as institutional Zoom accounts with extended session times and other benefits. However, I did not learn about this prospect until months into the pandemic, and my university's communication and approval processes would have been too difficult to navigate for some of my community partners. Even if I had known about this earlier, it would have taken too long to set up and implement. In-kind institutional responses and resources are helpful only if needed to conduct all of the partner's operational needs and not just the work connected to the service-learning.

Even though some of my partners may have had the set-up to connect with their clients online (and, in some cases, clients could be connected using iPads provided by their public schools as they shifted to online learning), "just use Zoom" was not as successful even with several contingencies in place. Out of the six partnerships with the ability to facilitate Zoom access for students to engage in some form of service-learning activity, only two of them did. Only one has continued coordinating Zoom-facilitated direct service efforts with members of the communities they serve.

One of my partners, an after-school youth organization, did not want to "overpromise and underdeliver" an experience with their clients. They indicated that, although my students' backgrounds in health sciences and STEM would have helped pre-COVID tutoring set-ups, many of their clients were not Zooming in to their e-activities. This partner felt that many of their clients were not attending because parents, already overworked trying to homeschool, may not have had the capacity to coordinate and oversee their children logging in. One of the coordinators, who had conducted telephone calls with the parents and guardians who had taken part in the socially distanced activities during the summer, shared these clients' feelings of stress that too many people were seeing "their messy homes" and lamenting a loss of privacy.

After a long conversation in which a director of an established nonprofit kept on expressing relief that I was not pressuring them to keep my students "doing some busywork or other," they became even more candid about their views on technology. They shared that "there is no manual, no training, no website" on how to manage volunteers over Zoom. They also expressed worries about how video chatting prevents people (both volunteers and coordinators) from reading those important facial and bodily cues while working face-to-face. Further, they indicated that those other ways of communicating with coworkers and trainees could not be transferred into the Zoom environment. They also learned that their communities had little interest in attending online versions of pre-COVID services and activities.

In addition to these issues, there have been unexpected problems in two of the service-learning opportunities, even with the capacity, technological support, and dedication of both agency staff and learners to make it work. For one of the partnered projects, which set students to engage in direct service activities with multicultural families and youth via various organizations, connecting online has not been a smooth ride. In this quote, one of the students speaks to the difficulty of providing tutoring via Zoom, even when she chose this engagement project because she likes teaching and often tutors sophomores at our campus: "Subjects like Math and English can be especially challenging because [young students use] worksheets and printed packets and it can be hard to see the papers through the cameras."

Another student, supported by both staff at my campus and a dedicated coordinator paid by a multiagency initiative to help deliver tutoring online, reflected on the difficulties of getting through one session:

> There is still the issue that it is sometimes hard to tutor students over video chat because students and tutors are still trying to get used to the format of the teaching sessions. It is also difficult because sometimes parents don't know how to use the technology to help students access the tutoring session. With the first two weeks of tutoring, some of my students struggled to log on to [the session], so [the agency's coordinator] and [the IT department support staff at the campus] changed the session to only include one Zoom meeting for everyone to join, and then we go into breakout rooms.

The digital divide in underserved communities has been augmented by the pandemic (Seymour et al., 2020). In later reflections, my students became aware that the needs of many clients served by agencies providing educational support could only be met by systematic infrastructural changes (Kim & Padilla, 2020). Families, especially non-White families, do not just require internet and access to technology; they also need the material, emotional, and political conditions in place to weather this pandemic at home.

Even with the difficulties, this group and other students indicated they were "getting used to it" and powering through their anxieties and Zoom fatigue from online classes, in order to deliver tutoring services. All of them, as well as those students working

for other partners, showed us that, despite the difficulties, they were enthusiastically ready to do what they could to give the community the best experience possible. As one related, "What we ended up doing was having the kids hold up their assignment to the camera so we could read the questions and help them answer it."

This experience with online tutoring counters not only some of the carefully curated "delivering a community engagement course during COVID" lists of resources and advice made available to educators by many nonprofit organizational bodies but also, broadly speaking, the literature around online learning. I wrote more critically about the former's efforts in an earlier publication about teaching during a pandemic (Mejia, 2020). For the latter, however, those of us on the ground (and most likely writing on, speaking of, and sharing with others about our attempts to use these technologies) are noticing how much is missed and how much more there is to learn about these new pedagogical spaces and the practices we are forced to engage in at a time of societal change.

As of the date that this report was written, final analyses of this situation have been perceived as positive by several people. After a student presentation of how they, as tutors, learned about themselves and the structural challenges affecting their tutees, many people congratulated us. I was praised for the activity, as it was suggested that the experience allowed students to "really operationalize class concepts." The students, in turn, were congratulated for "doing an excellent job despite it all." In my responses, I have reframed how their engagement with the partner was difficult and complex, emphasized that the setting and context was not ideal for everyone involved, and stated that I feared, even if I anchored the partnership's wishes, that the educational gains of tutees might have been minimal, as there is no way to measure and assess impact. Additionally, spring 2021 students have noticed a sharp decline in attendance to Zoom tutoring meetings due to changing school schedules and, most likely, family members' fatigue of having to coordinate when their children can attend.

In this particular vignette, we can see how critical approaches like the one I advocate for—anchoring the partnership, dedicating more time, and providing additional support to students conducting online service-learning activities in the community while remaining openly critical of the conditioning that dictates how such activities ought to be conducted—can still risk community partnership relationships with higher education bodies remaining "transactional" (Stewart & Alrutz, 2012) and never becoming transformative. In this particular case, constant communication with the agency means that I will make sure that they do not feel obligated to provide the experience if it is not going to be helpful to them.

Operating at the Margins While Speaking From the Margins: Some Words Geared to Historically Marginalized Scholars Teaching During the Plague

"The only thing that's good where you at is Prince. And he's dead."

My sister and I just argued about the person I am now that I live in the Midwest. The conversation was tense as I cannot travel to the Pacific Northwest, and she is unwilling to come here. "You're such a chipster," I said as I ended the call. A chipster, a portmanteau of hipster and Chicana, is what I have been using when referring to my younger sister because I was a bit envious of her. The White nonsense she needs to deal with where she lives in Portland is different from what I have to deal with in Minnesota. But all I want to tell her is that I am tired. I am anxious. I am also overwhelmed. And that I am, well, really, there are so many I am's that I must contend with lately. I am the only faculty member that has been specifically hired to design and direct community-based learning initiatives on my campus. I am one of the few women of color instructors, one of three, and the only one on the tenure track at the moment. I am also someone who embodies various sociopolitically devalued identities in a place where Whiteness has a unique way of affecting those who do not fit in. (Oh, so nicely!) And at the time of drafting this article, I am a faculty woman of color observing others on my campus and others that comprise the university system that

cuts my check, coming to terms that Minnesota Nice ain't going to cut it this time.

Teaching on a campus located 80 miles from the site where a White police officer asphyxiated a Black man with his knee, at a time where science denialism is on the political menu, has made my labors and responsibilities to my family, my students, and those that get paid more than me, feel infinite. It has meant that I had to figure out how to deliver the learning objectives of my community-engaged class in a way that does not go against my training as an intersectional feminist and my values of being raised in family settings where social justice was a significant part of how the grown-ups in my life lived theirs. And I had to do it while the majority of those around me were undergoing some form of racial awakening. I am . . . yes, I am navigating a pandemic spring and summer filled with the exhaustion of figuring out class schedules, community logistics, shifting reading timelines, and modified reflection assignments while also dealing with requests to talk, meet, discuss, facilitate, dialogue, and whatever other verbs I can add, from those who have now discovered that systemic racism is real and now want to talk to someone who is not White. And I am tired.

Faculty of color are more likely to be overrepresented in the design and delivery of community-based learning curriculum and coursework (Baez, 2000). I am a faculty member embodying various sociopolitically devalued identities, including a racialized-gendered one. This meant that centering the needs of my community partner, remaining aware of the multiplicity of students' issues, and strategically implementing existing institutional and other resources to deliver my course, made me likely to engage in counternormative practices with possible negative reverberations. Below, I reflect on several of these counternormative choices as a way to share possible challenges that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) faculty teaching community-engaged courses may encounter when implementing some of the guiding principles I shared earlier in this article.

Removing readings, assignments, and activities and replacing them with others that conformed to my vision of Community Collaborative was already a risky move. As a great Italian American diva once described the relationship between moves and motion as "causing a commotion" (Madonna, 1987), my curricular choices appeared to be causing a commotion of sorts. (In light of Midwestern White people's sensitivities.) According to my ex–PhD advisor–now friend, my syllabus was "tame" compared to what she has seen me introduce in the past. "I thought you would be adding more," she said as she looked at my reading list. We had met for one last lunch rendezvous in the city before completing my move to Rochester, Minnesota. I reminded her this is a STEM campus, and my class is the everyone-has-to-take-it-to-graduate-often-said-with-a-groan class. Later on, students of my spring 2020 semester had already learned from others that the class "was not as easy" as when so-and-so took it and that it had "too much reading." Seeing that service-learning and Whiteness (Bocci, 2015; Green, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2012) have an interesting history that I will not focus on in this text, I made several changes to the curriculum. I intentionally replaced all of the usual readings with works written by BIPOC scholars. Not only was creating a syllabus-with-too-many-articles-to-read-for-STEM-students-in-a-place-where-a-smile-might-not-mean-a-smile my response to the "invisibility and normative privileges of Whiteness [that] shape . . . and are reinforced by service-learning" (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 615), it was my way of practicing the citational justice praxis advocated by Sara Ahmed and other women of color. Causing a commotion, by Minnesota standards, and making sure more than 80% of the readings were from subaltern authors, was my way to "acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow" (Ahmed, 2016, pp. 15–16).

In addition to the curriculum, the way that I would engage with new and existing community partnerships needed to embody a similar spirit of antioppressive theory and praxis. Six of the nine partnerships were headed by people who did not fit into the

region's standard—five of them were led by BIPOC individuals. One of those agencies was led by a person who sat on my hiring committee. All of them knew where I stood and that I understood that they were not only providing our students with unique opportunities but that they were doing this knowing full well that the campus and the university system needed them more than the other way around. Three of the six coinstructors in this class were present during my job talk months before; one of them had a say on my hiring. Meaning, most people knew who and what they were getting into when they got me. And they could at least imagine how I would react to the institutional processes that shape how universities in the United States enter and attempt to maintain ties to the communities that help deliver community-engaged educational experiences.

But the curriculum was the least of my worries here. Most students enrolled in fall 2019 were okay with it. Yes, the usual outlier reacted less than positively to exploring White supremacy in a reflection assignment or two. And the majority of students of color felt the class was one they wished they had taken earlier in their college trajectory. Whether it happens during a pandemic or in times of relative normality, centering the partnership and community needs appears to be more detrimental to the BIPOC scholar than choosing to deliver a curriculum based on subaltern knowledge. In my case, centering these needs meant that I was decentering the "musts" imposed on minoritized faculty who engage in community-based learning, teaching, and research by all of those who manage the institutionalization of community-campus initiatives. (Talk about causing a commotion.)

During the earlier days of COVID-19, most of my time and energy had to be devoted to my partners and the communities they serve, as well as my students. This situation also meant that an excess of labor for any existing service obligations, committees, and the like would push me to work on weekends. This impossible number of obligations during the pandemic has been the norm for women faculty (Dingel et al., 2021; Minello, 2020). It also meant that I would not enter into any new obligations connected to COVID-19 and campus–community desires to help, most of them coming from outside or from systemwide. I had no time. And, in much honesty, attending webinars about teaching during COVID-19, especially the ones geared to community-engaged teaching, ended up fueling my desire to write why these and other institutional resources were not helpful. Hence this article. The times that I did attend, I was forced to listen to 30 minutes of whoever repeating the same things that did nothing to help me or help my community partners and 15 minutes in Zoom breakout rooms to jot down ideas on what we were already doing. And unsurprisingly, those breakout rooms were a mix of people asking, "Does anyone have anything?" while another responds, "I came because I wanted to see where you were all at." And another attendee asking, "You?" After attending three of these webinars, I felt that my time could be spent elsewhere. And when George Floyd was murdered, there were more seminars with even more things that did not help me but did add to a persistent sense of emotional exhaustion.

The problem here was not the lack of resources, but that my absence, as one of two people engaged in community-based initiatives in my campus (the other one being our director of experiential learning), was hypervisible. At one point, I was sure that I would not be missed because the meetings, the workshops, and the talks were attended by so many people across campuses. However, I eventually learned that there was a noticeable absence when someone outside my campus cautioned that "not being present" could be detrimental in the near future. My decision to carve time and find ways to be present during these many system-level gatherings, including answering emails connected to whatever asks were attached to them, could also be a detriment to someone from the margins, operating from the margins, and attempting to stay in the margins. In a way, this was saying something to those that operate from the center. As I finish this reflective detour, I have yet to understand the implications of my absence, which would not be perceived negatively nor affect me in negative ways if I were a White faculty member.

I penned this section somewhat candidly as a way to highlight the possible implications of conducting community-engaged learning from the margins. In contrast to others, those who operate from the margins, or in ways that go against the usual practices, find themselves delivering an educational experience that does not engage the community as cocreators of knowledge and as instructional partners. If "positionality may

determine the extent to which we can successfully implement" (Latta et al., 2018, p. 48) critical approaches to community-engaged teaching and learning, then how does it shape the spaces that we can operate from to transform them? Knowing that positionalities made vulnerable by axes of difference and power shape those spaces, places, and practices to imagine transformative ways of engaging in community with our communities, then how do moments of crisis figure into this dynamic? As can be deduced from this section, a pandemic, in addition to embodying intersectional differences in a place where such distinctions are highly noticeable, forced me to figure out how to deliver a community-engaged curriculum that stayed true to its intellectual and political, as well as educational, objectives while not decentering the community. However, it is yet to be seen what the afterlives of my decisions look like postpandemic.

Discussion

Service-learning activities pivoted due to COVID-19 have been shown to be successful when centering the community partnerships' needs (Flores et al., 2020; Talmage et al., 2020). Gresh et al.'s (2020) service-learning class geared to nursing students exemplified this approach. The authors attributed the success of their community-partnered course to focusing on the needs of the partner and their clientele while staying loyal to practices and processes of reciprocity, faculty engagement, critical written reflective work for students, creative use of existing resources, and remaining informed and inspired by a critical analysis of power. In this text, I outlined a model that advocates centering the needs of community partners with a prompt assessment of demands on their operational capacity due to COVID-19 while simultaneously and carefully shifting parts of the curriculum to match students' evolving needs and working from the margins via cautious/strategic use of institutional resources.

As noted by my exemplars and other published work on community-engaged learning during this crisis, there are certain limitations when choosing to center the partnership, remaining open and flexible to students' needs, and choosing to limit one's use of existing resources and strategies. There are stressors to the faculty and staff members delivering the curriculum online and preserving the critical praxis that shapes it. Student disengagement from the community-partnered projects might remain despite our efforts to be flexible. For many of us, the scramble to provide community-engaged courses left no time to implement assessment of student learning and community impact. Sociostructural issues, such as the unequal access to technology in historically disadvantaged and underserved communities, might affect projects that a community partner and the community itself had planned to deliver with student help and willingness, faculty guidance, and technological support. Finally, faculty and practitioners of community-engaged service-learning who are also members of minoritized groups might end up putting themselves against more mainstream approaches to campus–community-based learning, thereby further jeopardizing their professional futures.

The framework I outlined in this article was not only inspired by what others have noted to be the institutionalization and neoliberalization of community-engaged learning but was shaped by many community members' critiques of partnerships between themselves and the university as asymmetrical, unequal, and disempowering, a sentiment captured by Stoecker and Tryon's (2009) question, "Who is served by service-learning?" With this sentiment in mind, I end this piece on a few points of departure to explore community engagement learning, research, and practice in light of a postpandemic moment.

- *Learning:* What practices, if any, have worked in delivering a community-engaged educational online experience that does not create burdens for those it seeks to serve and transform? How have these rapid shifts to online delivery of community-engaged courses shifted students' attitudes toward community engagement?

- *Research:* How do we examine the way relationships between community groups and our respective universities operate? How do we measure, with an eye toward reparation and accountability, a campus's impact on communities? Seeing that COVID-19 has made visible these fractures and shown the inconsistencies between the ethos of a university in the service of the community and the reality of

community-based learning as institutionalized and shaped to meet neoliberal demands of the student as a consumer, how do we begin collecting and amplifying community members' narratives of the value of campus–community learning initiatives during COVID-19?

- *Practice:* How do we implement practices and assess community impact in ways that center community voices and empower stakeholders while keeping higher education accountable? Finally, and this comes from my conversations with many community partners along the lines of "you [the university in general, and faculty in particular] need us [community partners] more than we need you," how do we measure community resilience and transformation in the absence of reciprocal and transformative relationships with higher education and in response to the current transactional nature of these relationships?

Conclusion

My goal with this article was to share a set of guidelines, including best practices and those that are definitely not the best, for educators positioned to deliver community-engaged university-level coursework during times of societal crisis like a pandemic. The rapidly developed workarounds that make up this framework—centering the partnership, assessing students' needs, and cautiously and strategically implementing existing institutional resources—emerged from moments that I called "crisis teaching." Said moments have positioned many educators and practitioners like me to interrogate, collude with, and navigate institutional processes that counter the intellectual foundations of our courses and the community-based knowledge(s) and practices that strengthen the scholarship we cocreated with various communities that welcome us in the spirit of collective betterment.

Throughout this text, my tone urges others to critically examine how departments, campuses, organizational bodies, and coalitions working on behalf of higher education's community–campus initiatives may or may not be prepared to provide this support during disruptive social moments. Portending that those of us in higher education will once again experience rapid transition due to societal crises, I argue that the effects of this pandemic have made more visible, and possibly easier to shift and transform, critical concerns in how universities continue to engage with the communities they claim to serve. As others have demonstrated (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Brackmann, 2015; Costa & Leong, 2012; D'Arcangelis & Sarathy, 2015; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), practices of a neoliberal university, which in part have capitalized on the service to the community element, are antithetical to reciprocity and reproduce community–campus connections, obligations, and responsibilities that are hierarchical and detrimental and, at times, exploitative. Knowing this, what should those of us who choose to teach, research, and practice community engagement in higher education take into consideration as we continue to perform this work? I say this knowing that many of us choose to remain on this path despite the detrimental effects on our professional lives. The pandemic has made it clear that many of us will not tolerate the way it has always been and are willing to imagine something better. Perhaps the work should be that of continuing to advocate for and establish the conditions that position communities to thrive while simultaneously challenging those that prevent them from doing so.

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Community Engagement by Social Design: Research and Outreach Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This article presents a university–community engagement project established between the Social Design Integrated Center of the Design School (CIDS/UEMG) at Minas Gerais State University in Brazil and the Lagoinha Complex community. The day before we started the extension project, Como a Palma de Minha Mão (Like the Palm of My Hand), social distancing was decreed in our town due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three months after the suspension of our actions, we had adapted to all changes imposed by the pandemic and resumed activities. The pandemic challenged us to be open to learning more about and with communities as we have close contact with them, and to question how can we promote this type of engagement remotely. This challenge especially applies to the elderly population that represents the leading risk group but lacks access to new communication technologies in Brazil.

Keywords: outreach, engagement, communication, social design, pandemic

The Minas Gerais State University (UEMG) is a state, tuition-free, and multicampus Brazilian university created in 1989. The project we will present in this article was approved and financed by the Extension Support Program of the University and is linked to the Web for Life Institutional Program, which was created by the Pro Rectory of Extension of the university in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program aims to encompass, integrate, and support efforts to cope with the pandemic through extension projects that encourage health care, promote social distancing, articulate means of protection for citizens, and support all ways of dealing with the pandemic.

The project Como a Palma de Minha Mão: Memórias para Redesenhar a Cidade (Like the Palm of My Hand: Memories to Redesign the City) was proposed by researchers from the Social Design Integrated Center of the Design School (CIDS/UEMG) and is carried out within an "embroidery community" of elderly women in the Lagoinha Complex, a socially troubled urban area in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

The CIDS/UEMG, in which we operate, has carried out a series of research and extension actions aimed at vulnerable communities. Social design is an area of design that is concerned with the designer's role and responsibility in society, that is, with the use of the design process to bring about positive social change. The social designer works by creating products, services, or business models, or conducting projects to promote positive social impact. When working with communities, participatory design can be an effective methodology for finding solutions to common problems. As the term "participatory design" implies, people are invited to participate actively in the entire design process, which leads the social designer to assume the role of mediator rather than coordinator of a project. In this context, dialoguing with the human and social sciences, the designer creates adequate space to identify problems and create

solutions to engage the community in their implementation and maintenance.

The Methodological Approach

The project Como a Palma de Minha Mão envisages gathering life stories from the elderly women inhabiting the Lagoinha Complex by concretizing them in embroideries made by these participants. These women have long been denied the necessary basic conditions to record their memories in written language as a consequence of social inequality. Nevertheless, they have broken through this written word restriction and cultural hegemony by illustrating their female narratives through their handicrafts. Using embroidery and other artisanal techniques, they have created alternative means of registering personal and social collective memories and subjectivities. This way of being, knowing, and doing seems to be an authentic, resilient attitude facing historical oppressions such as discrimination related to gender, ethnicity, instruction level, social class, and ageism. Consistent with Paulo Freire's educational emancipatory premises, this extension project aims to strengthen the processes of identity construction, stimulating protagonism and autonomy.

The participatory approach considers the importance of traditional community knowledge and intersubjective exchanges among faculty members and those involved in the project horizontally. Thus, the affirmation of the women involved as coresearchers is based on the idea of participation inherent in educational practices aimed at emancipation. When considering them as protagonists of the process, we seek to break a little with the historical distinction that separates researchers—representatives of the university—and community members. This aim, which brings the premises of Paulo Freire's (1978, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1993, 2011) critical pedagogy, invites the community to reflect and act in interaction with the university and not under its command.

Paulo Freire, as Giroux (2010) reminded us,

> occupies a hallowed position among the founders of "critical pedagogy"—the educational movement guided by both passion and principle to help people develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, connect knowledge to power and agency, and learn to read both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for justice and democracy. (p. 335)

Thus, life trajectories, subjectivities, and traditional knowledge of the community dialogue with university researchers' life trajectories, subjectivities, and academic knowledge. As Holland and Gelmon (2003) claimed, it is necessary to understand the "potential for enhancing community relations, student learning, and overall scholarly performance of the institution through applied scholarship and various forms of community-based learning" (p. 105). This way of working with communities encourages developing a more critical and sensitive view of the reality that surrounds them, being able to arouse interest and promote engagement toward a common goal.

The methodological approach of participatory design, in turn, seeks to encourage the involvement of participants through design activities. This posture provides for creating a collaborative way within a project in which designers and nondesigners work together at all stages of the process (Manzini, 2015). This approach demands other abilities from the designer, such as communication, empathy, and acceptance of the subjectivities in a relational action aimed at building and sharing visions and scenarios in consonance with the ways of making design in contemporary times: shifting from building meaning *for* a community toward building meaning *with* the community, engaging in the process of cooperation among the various agents involved, along with the concept of codesign (Noronha et al., 2017, p. 222). Holland and Gelmon (2003) corroborated this perception by stating, "As academics, we are trained as experts. We tend to imagine community partnerships in which the institution identifies a need and offers an expert solution to the otherwise hapless (or helpless) community" (p. 105).

Design is a theoretical and practical area that shapes futures; it has the potential to create new scenarios and generate other possible, desirable futures—in short, to project the future. According to Escobar (2018, p. 15), design is at the center of the entire sociological crisis we are going through, being the vector of unsustainability and "defuturization." However, according to the same author, if design is used in another way, it

can be part of the solution. This view finds an echo in the aspect called "critical design" (Dunne & Raby, 2013), which problematizes the future by raising more inquiries than certainties. As Scharmer stated (2018),

> We have the gift to engage with two very different qualities and streams of time. One of them is a quality of the present moment that is basically an extension of the past. The present moment is shaped by what has been. The second is a quality of the present moment that functions as a gateway to a field of future possibilities. The present moment is shaped by what is wanting to emerge. That quality of time, if connected to, operates from presencing the highest future potential. The word presencing blends "sensing" with "presence." It means to sense and actualize one's highest future potential. Whenever we deal with disruption, it is this second stream of time that matters most. Because without that connection we tend to end up as victims rather than co-shapers of disruption. (Learning from the Future as It Emerges, para. 6)

Thus, as stated by Gonzatto et al. (2013, p. 44), since the future depends on people, to obviate the need to wait for the future to arrive, people can start making that future real right now, that is, transforming that future into a present, that dream into reality. This is the perspective of social design: mediating future creation processes in partnership with the community. In this sense, participatory methodologies such as participatory design bring something that we consider fundamental in extension and engagement actions: inviting those involved to become protagonists and coresponsible for the processes and results.

Adaptations Imposed by the Pandemic

Three months after the suspension of our actions and having adapted to all changes imposed by the pandemic, we decided to resume activities. One of the most significant obstacles we have encountered involved the maintenance of communication with the participants. The interaction that would occur in weekly face-to-face meetings with women had to be adapted and addressed to each individually. Most participating women have not mastered digital technology, do not have a mobile phone, or do not have access to the internet. In Brazil, the pandemic exacerbated the vast inequality in access to digital technologies, especially among the elderly and low-income citizens. Therefore, our most significant difficulty was the project participants' lack of familiarity with this universe and their anxiety when dealing with technology, which led to demotivation and consequent loss of interest. To overcome this challenge, we have sought support from their relatives, asking them to install video conferencing apps in the women's mobile phones and help them learn how to use them. These extension actions require continuous communication with the communities involved. This has been our biggest challenge during the pandemic, mainly due to the project participants' low level of schooling or illiteracy.

However, the impediments we encountered propelled us toward ideas that have given the project other qualities, listed below. We migrated from face-to-face group meetings to individual interviews through teleconference applications. During the latter, participants' life experience stories were triggered by the principal question: "Thinking about your life story, your trajectory, what places can you say you know like the palm of your hand?" The resulting conversation is based on life memory narratives linked to the places where events occurred, in which everyday scenes are remembered in rural and urban landscapes, including the Lagoinha Complex. They support the elaboration of the images that are being embroidered on the fabrics.

In Freire's book *A Importância de Ler: Em Três Artigos que se Completam* (1989; *The Importance of the Act of Reading: In Three Articles Which Complete Each Other*) the author described his earlier memories of learning how to read. He reported that even before being able to read the written word, he had the opportunity to perceive and *read the world* through his senses. The texts, words, and letters of that context were embodied in a series of things, objects, and signs.

Paulo Freire recalled landscapes, situations, houses, trees, birds, noise, and other perceptions that, like a text, were discovered and read in the daily life of his boyish world. He also told us about his literacy process, started by his parents in the backyard of his house, under a mango tree's shade, using

the floor as a blackboard and sticks as chalk. There, the reading of the word, according to Freire (1989), flowed naturally from the reading of the private world and later, at school, Freire reported that his teachers were also committed to reading the *palavramundo*, or *world-word*, a neologism he created to designate the link between reading the word and reading the world.

In the same way, we proposed remembrance to the women who participated in the project, the narration and the concretization of their immediate worlds. Performing this task requires an exercise in rereading of remarkable perceptions recorded throughout life, communication through orality and its expression in images. This communication comes about first by drawing or making digital collages that can give rise to the sketches of embroidery, and then by embroidering their drawings using needle and thread. As a result of isolation, these embroideries, which would have been produced at weekly meetings, are being made by women in their own homes, using material in kits provided by the project. In addition to the specific materials for embroidery—thread, needles, fabric—the kits include items that encourage taking time for self-care. The requirement to stay at home has led to an extra amount of female domestic service, especially in patriarchal societies such as ours in Brazil, which often are also marked by gender prejudice and violence. Considering the group's specificity, the maintenance of actions can also be understood as a way of coping with the social isolation imposed by the pandemic, a form of care. Among the various changes made, we highlight the adaptation of the approach, mediation, and language. As Holland indicated (2005),

> rhetoric is a strong influence on partnership understanding, for good or for bad, and each partner talks about their perspective in different terms, styles, and with different cultural values in mind. A common language may not be feasible, but we can explore pathways to better listening and comprehension . . . the essence of good communications. (pp. 15–16)

Considering the impossibility of meeting and the weakening of the experience that only face-to-face exchange provides, we developed printed material to accompany these kits. This material, a mediation notebook, presents a narrative mainly based on illustrations since some women in the group are illiterate.

The adult literacy method developed by Paulo Freire involved so-called culture circles, meetings in which those involved talked about their daily lives and the extreme situations experienced in the community. Themes and words coming from those men and women's universe that are generated from these meetings will be used in the literacy process. Paulo Freire and his colleagues realized that literacy was achieved more quickly and efficiently when the words and phrases chosen by educators were part of the community's knowledge and action universe. Similarly, the mediation notebook that we developed to integrate the embroidery and self-care kit contains illustrations that communicate the project proposal. These illustrations, which are shown in Figure 1, were specially created for this notebook by Vitor Siqueira Miranda, the visual arts undergraduate student who works in the project.

According to Paulo Freire (1989), the words with which to organize the literacy program must come from the vocabulary of popular groups, expressing their everyday language, their anxieties, concerns, needs, and dreams. For Freire, literacy involves the transcription of authentic oral expression, and the ones involved in this process are responsible for building, writing, and reading language in a context meaningful to this population.

Thus, to overcome these challenges, we intend that this material will play the role of social mediator, using thought-provoking words and images to reinforce the speech in the virtual meetings. If the written word can be frightening, the drawings promote an approximation of these women's universe by presenting shapes and objects that are familiar to them: hands, embroidery materials, household objects, and the features of an elderly woman's face. Thus, in our project, the memory becomes a word said, heard, transcribed, read, drawn, and embroidered to be reread, now as an image.

Pandemic Learnings—Empathy, Compassion, and Solidarity

We are all learning a lot from the COVID-19 pandemic. As Santos (2020, para. 16) stated, any quarantine is always discriminatory,

Figure 1. Mediation Notebook Illustrations Designed by Vitor Siqueira Miranda

more difficult for some social groups than for others. They are the groups that have a particular vulnerability in common that precedes the quarantine and worsens with it. Such groups make up what he calls "the South." "The South" does not refer to a geographical space. It signifies political, social, and cultural space-time. It is a metaphor for unjust human suffering caused by capitalist exploitation, racial and sexual discrimination. In his study, Santos analyzed the quarantine from the perspective of more vulnerable groups, among them women and the elderly. Santos highlighted how women are *the caregivers of the world* because they are the majority in the task of caring, both inside and outside the home and especially in the areas of health, nursing, and social assistance, making them even more vulnerable. In addition, confinement in tight spaces has triggered violence against women, as witnessed in several parts of the world during the pandemic.

Regarding especially the elderly, Santos (2020) pointed out that, for several reasons, many elderly people in the global North already live in isolation in nursing homes, which with the pandemic have become places with a high risk of infection. However, he also observed that in more impoverished regions—such as where we operate—the situation of the elderly is different, and most of them are at home, taking care of their families and, often, supporting them. In fact, in contact with some women and our Social Assistance Reference Center partner, cases of exploitation and violence against women were verified during the pandemic. A more common complaint among women was that they were unable to attend the activities they were used to, such as handicraft courses, elderly groups, and, above all, the embroidery groups that had been meeting weekly for 10 years and had to be interrupted due to the pandemic. In this context, the decision to continue the project even in the face of social distancing required us to make a series of adaptations in the project's scope. Still, it also led us to reflect on the need for this action to care for the women who were participating in the project and encourage them to take care of themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been causing deep suffering for humanity, especially for the most vulnerable and impoverished people. The emergency presented the world with the challenge of coping with the disease, resulting in the search for medicines, vaccines, equipment, and procedures and

the imposition of distance and social isolation, among many other challenges. Many people (professionals or not) have been mobilized to find solutions quickly and efficiently to the most varied problems that arose with the pandemic, among them the designers.

In social design projects, listening to people is essential. Through participatory methodologies, such as the one we used, people are involved in all stages of the design process. In this context, it is essential to develop empathy and be sensitive to others' perspectives. Davenport (2015) referred to empathy as one of the leader's characteristics at the service of the community, but he pointed out the need to go beyond empathy:

> It lacks a clear next step for those who are willing to empathize with another. Because of this shortcoming, it may be necessary to look beyond empathy toward something deeper to provide us with answers to these questions. For that, I have chosen to turn to compassion as a way of addressing this shortcoming. (p. 303)

Davenport's arguments differentiate empathy from compassion, adding to compassion the quality of impelling us to action to alleviate the other's suffering.

The literature on higher education outreach and engagement and the servant-leadership concept reflect nuanced distinctions between the North American and Brazilian perspectives regarding university outreach. In Brazil, we use the word "extension" to designate educational, cultural, and scientific process that articulates teaching and research in an inseparable way and enables a transforming relationship between the university and society. Various factors serve as guidelines for university extension: impact and transformation; dialogical interaction; and interdisciplinarity and indissolubility among education-research-extension (Fórum de Pró-Reitores de Extensão, 2007, pp. 17–18).

We therefore agree with Davenport (2015) when he says that in addition to empathy, the development of compassion becomes essential in outreach projects, since "while both empathy and compassion call on us to enter into an understanding of the feelings and experiences of another, it is the inner motivation for action found in compassion that differentiates the two" (p. 304). For Davenport, compassion leads to an action that aims to alleviate the suffering of the other and, from our perspective, it is precisely in this kind of action that we find the virtue of compassion. In the book *Pequeno Tratado das Grandes Virtudes* (Small Treatise on the Great Virtues), André Comte-Sponville (1995) concluded that compassion is what allows us to move from the affective order to the ethical order, from what we feel to what we want, from what we are to what we owe. Comte-Sponville further proposed that love also carries out this movement; even if that love may not be within our reach, compassion is (pp. 128–129).

Our theoretical framework is based on the thought of Paulo Freire, who very much emphasized the importance of university extension, but who criticized the use of the word "extension," preferring instead the word "communication" in its coherence with the praxis of reflection-and-action. For Freire, the meaning represented by the expression "university extension" reflects an idea of cultural invasion, which would correspond to the act of extending an elaborated knowledge to those who still do not have it, thus killing in them the critical capacity to have it (Freire, 1983, O Equivoco Gnosiológico da Extensão, para. 23). On the other hand, according to Freire, education means interaction, therefore it is not simply transferring knowledge but making sense of what is meaningful to those involved in the process. This approach invites us to act with ethics, care, respect, and admiration toward communities.

Contributions of Extension to the Training of Students

Another significant dimension of community engagement projects is their contribution to the training of team members in direct contact with communities in real situations. Thus, we highlight the participation of a visual arts degree course student, 26-year-old Vitor Siqueira Miranda (2021), in the elaboration of the illustrations in the mediation notebook. His work was developed in concurrence with us, the project's coordinating professors, the research universe, and the perception of the project's context and communication demands in the face of the pandemic. We reproduce below his perspective on the project and the impacts on its formation:

Since my insertion in this project, I have been able to understand how much this experience would add to my personal and academic training. In addition to providing me with the experience of participating in a research and extension project, it allows me to experience art education in front of a target audience with which I had not yet had experience and [which] certainly would have a lot to teach me. This project is seen by me as an alternative to fill social gaps, rescuing cloistered stories in the lack of the opportunity to speak. The proposition provides ways to explore the city from its residents' subjective perspective, resuming memories and stories reconstructed by the artistic bias. In this way, community is valued and perceived in several layers, showing their active participation in the city's development, as the protagonists of this story. Another relevant aspect of this process is the democratization of art, addressing and developing a palpable conception of art-making and being an artist. These concepts are often misunderstood, distancing people from their artistic being.

Because of the pandemic situation, it was necessary to redesign an entire process that has been under development for some time, which requires a lot of creativity and resilience to make a coherent adaptation, minimizing the inevitable losses of the situation. Starting from my place of speech, a graduate student in visual arts, experiencing art education in several instances, I realize how much the current situation has impacted thinking/planning/practicing teaching and learning. The scenario formed in the face of the pandemic is substantially based on uncertainties, which undoubtedly complicates the proposal of actions and responses to the pandemic. Despite the countless difficulties that exist, I understand that it is necessary to resist and maintain projects like this, which have even more relevant social and cultural functions in this period. Faced with the pandemic, the group participating in the project is currently the most affected part of the population. They are deprived of their daily life as a whole, forced to avoid coexistence, religiosity, family, entertainment, etc. The project has great potential to enable social connections, creating communication links between thoughts and stories, these shared through stories and embroidered memories. The possibility of conceiving contact among people deprived of each other gives the action even more relevance. It is with great pride that I participate in the project *Like the Palm of my Hand: Memories to Redesign the City*, helping in the design of tools and methodologies that can enable these connections among people, city, and art.

Considering this account, we highlight the huge formative potential of extension actions and community engagement involving college students in community-based learning. As noted by Holland and Gelmon (2003), these actions are configured as "knowledge-based collaborations in which all partners have things to teach each other, things to learn from each other, and things they will learn together" (p. 107).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of actions, as pointed out by Holland (2005), it is important to develop "compelling ways to measure the quality and impact of partnership work, especially from the perspective of the community" (p. 16). In the current project, we deal with data involving subjectivities, life stories, and meanings attributed to the territory. Thus, we plan to measure the impacts by listening to the community's voices at different times in the development of the actions. This evaluation will be made based on the participants' impressions of the project so that the evaluation of the process will take into account their points of view as participants and as producers of knowledge. The data set to be analyzed in a participatory manner also encompasses the images produced: the drawings, digital collages, and embroidery.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the execution of our work with the community and, consequently, the documentation strategies. As a possible solution, a website is under development. Like the Palm of

My Hand: Memories to Redesign the City (andreiadebernardi.com.br/projetos/lik-ethepalmofmyhand/) is a website that will house the daily research, the conversations, the most relevant themes raised in the online meetings, the drawings, the embroidery, other images, and relevant information. The page will be updated continuously throughout the project, functioning as a virtual field notebook containing the project's methodological path, with periodic posts that will record the course taken.

This website was a solution based on the constraints imposed by the pandemic. In a single virtual address, it hosts different forms of data itself—texts, photographs, videos, and podcasts—as well as treatment and analysis of that data. The website can be accessed by the general public, functioning as a way to document, monitor, evaluate, and disseminate the project's actions, which can be replicated in other contexts.

We believe that this will be a form of transparent monitoring and evaluation, which will show the successes, challenges, and failures of the project, to be pointed out by the community itself, representatives of the university, and partners, making them visible to society at large. As Holland (2005) wrote, "engagement programs and partnerships abound, but their stories are rarely captured and disseminated" (p. 16). Thus, we see the creation of this website as a positive consequence of the crisis that we are going through because it will significantly expand the scope of the project's actions—not only in Brazil but also abroad, opening another channel of communication, reflection, and debate at national and international levels.

The production of this website, which was not initially planned, required the mobilization of resources from the Web for Life Program. This program has subsidized several specific initiatives. Although the university offers some funding, it is not enough to cover all the financial needs of the project. Other opportunities for financial support, such as public subsidies and sponsorship from local companies, should be considered.

Partnerships

Interinstitutional partnerships were established in the neighborhood, the main ones being with the Municipal Secretary of Culture and the Municipal Secretary of Social Assistance, through the Social Assistance Reference Center, where weekly meetings would be held. However, the day before we started taking action, social distancing was decreed in our city due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is worth mentioning that in our projects, partnerships are often established directly with groups and people in the community, without necessarily involving a civil society organization or association. This direct relationship with the community can bring benefits, in that individuals and groups can highlight their own interests; however, it imposes challenges related to communication and the organization of the group throughout the project, aspects that with the COVID-19 pandemic have become more complex.

Expected Results and Some Reflections in Process

We envision that this project will strengthen the community's identity construction processes and stimulate the participants' self-esteem, autonomy, and protagonism. It is worth mentioning that the impact will expand to these women's family nuclei and relationship circles since they are also mothers, grandmothers, teachers, and community leaders. Such impacts will be measured by listening to the people involved in the project.

Regarding the university, we believe that this experience of facing the pandemic through the realization of extension projects can teach us a lot and reaffirm the necessary balance among the pillars that characterize the university: teaching, research, and extension. Although this harmonic triad is encouraged, we agree with Cox and Seifer's (2005) statement: "Faculty members' priorities are to teach and research, and students' priority is to learn. However, these two interests do not automatically translate into meeting the needs or matching the individual project interests of communities" (p. 28).

In our country, teaching and research have always been more present or have been considered as more important dimensions of higher education's mission. However, our university's efforts have been directed toward increasing extension through support programs with grants for teachers and students and specific financing programs

such as Web for Life, which was created as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and involved several extension projects. In this respect, the Minas Gerais State University can be considered an engaged campus. Holland (2001) corroborated this assessment, stating that the engaged institution

> is committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually-beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, expertise, resources, and information. These interactions enrich and expand the learning and discovery functions of the academic institution while also enhancing community capacity. The work of the engaged campus is responsive to (and respectful of) community-identified needs, opportunities, and goals in ways that are appropriate to the campus' mission and academic strengths. (p. 24)

Paulo Freire affirmed that educating is a political act and an act of love. In his adult literacy program, he envisioned promoting people's awareness through dialogue, leading them to observe their reality, become aware of it, and transform it. The reading of the world process, followed by the reading and writing of the word, was, therefore, a necessary instrument for the work of emancipating the oppressed: men and women who, from this awareness, could become agents of change in their condition.

We know the importance of carefully choosing the words we use. Even when studied from the etymological perspective, different meanings can be attributed to them depending on the cultural, political, ideological, and even linguistic context in which they are applied. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that Paulo Freire's invitation makes us consider replacing the word "compassion" with the word "solidarity" and the word "extension" with the word "communication."

Thus, we conducted this project to contribute to the realization of actions that can stimulate the emancipation of social groups less favored or made invisible by society. We intend to raise awareness and bring to light the potential of the transformative praxis in research and extension programs, in aspects that might be relevant to strengthening the social, political, and activist character of these interventions, hence encouraging communities to envisage and develop the necessary conditions for their well-being.

The pandemic calls us to an even greater opening to learning in direct contact with the community, but how to promote engagement at a distance? How, especially, can we do so for the elderly who are part of the main risk group and who, in Brazil, have little or no access to new communication technologies?

Answering this and other questions critically and reflectively through the documentation of the stages of the project Como a Palma de Minha Mão may open new avenues for the engagement of communities in the future.

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Utilizing Disruption as an Opportunity: A Comparative Case Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Community Engagement Partnership Formation

Becca Berkey and Chelsea Lauder

Abstract

This article focuses on the implications and creative possibility catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic and reinvigorated racial justice movement on infrastructure that seeks to build transformational community-engaged teaching and research partnerships. Pulling from existing literature around critical service-learning and the wisdom of scholars from the Black, Indigenous, person of color (BIPOC) community, we discuss how these lasting changes will advance our institution's structures for responsible community engagement, as well as inform the field's focus on antiracist community engagement.

Keywords: community partnerships, COVID-19, comparative case study, racial justice, antiracist community engagement

Community-Engaged Teaching and Research at Northeastern University and the Impacts of COVID-19

At the crossroads of the COVID-19 pandemic and a global call for racial justice, we have unearthed new synergies in our university's work around community-engaged teaching in higher education. Northeastern University is a private, urban institution in Boston, Massachusetts. The university enrolls over 15,000 undergraduate students alongside an additional 10,000 graduate students and places a focus on experiential education, including service-learning opportunities for students at all levels. Northeastern's Office of City and Community Engagement, which is housed outside academic or student affairs with a standalone division, facilitates 80–100 service-learning courses each academic year. These courses enroll over 2,000 students, are taught by over 70 faculty members, and cut across all colleges and disciplines at the university.

In order to facilitate quality service-learning experiences across the university, we have formal and informal infrastructural support systems for faculty members, students, and community partners. The formal channels of support can be grouped into two main themes: classroom support and partnership support. For the classroom support, faculty members who want to integrate community engagement into their courses can meet with our team for consultations, utilize asynchronous resources on course design, or participate in our synchronous year-long, cohort-based Faculty Fellows Program. These course design and classroom support resources are supplemented with our Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (S-LTA) Program. Every faculty member has the option to work with an S-LTA, a student who is hired, trained, and mentored by our team over the course of the semester. Service-learning teaching assistants support service-learning courses by working alongside the faculty member to provide student mentorship, manage community partnership logistics, prepare

students for community engagement, lead reflection, and ensure integration of service with the course objectives. Outside the classroom experience itself, our team provides systems for evaluation and assessment. These include student pre- and post-service assessments, community partner mid and final semester evaluation, S-LTA program evaluation, and a faculty program evaluation. Responses and results of these assessments are utilized to enhance partnership and student experiences while also informing our programmatic structures and are shared with our stakeholders.

In terms of partnership support, we offer a centralized process through which we initiate community partnerships between faculty at the institution and community-based organizations. This process, which we call our Request for Partnerships (RFP), begins by gathering faculty member motivations, course goals, and student learning objectives. Then, community partners provide us with information about their organization's mission and overview, semester-specific goals, volunteer needs, and project ideas, as well as the general location of and populations that engage with the organization. Accompanying our RFP form itself are both synchronous and asynchronous resources for developing responsible community partnerships. These resources are shared with faculty members, community partners, and S-LTAs. After initial matches are made between community partners and faculty members, we provide conversation guides and regular check-ins with all parties to ensure partnerships are progressing and meeting the shared goals and expectations that have been established.

The spring 2020 semester included 53 service-learning course sections, taught by 41 faculty members who were supported by nearly 50 student leaders. Our university transitioned to fully remote learning beginning March 10 and, at that point, we asked faculty members, students, and S-LTAs to follow guidance set by their community partner around whether to continue their engagement component. That said, also during that upheaval the university was making decisions that impacted students and ultimately sent them back to their home communities if they lived in on-campus housing (meaning they were no longer in Boston for the duration of the semester). So, even if and when partner organizations still had the capacity and need for students in person, we were no longer able to support those needs.

Despite all this, most community-engaged courses continued their service-learning partnerships. Doing so was possible both because in many cases projects were already primarily or easily adapted to a remote environment, or students stepped in as called in other ways (making phone calls for organizations to check in on their service population, finishing lesson plans and handing them off for future use, etc.). Our team spent most of this time in triage mode, first and foremost checking on our faculty, partners, and student leaders to see that they were okay, and then working to provide the support needed to salvage what they could from what remained. Our Virtual Service-Learning EXPO (https://web.northeastern.edu/servicelearningexpo/?category_name=spring-2020) showcases some of the products of our spring 2020 partnerships.

Throughout the summer, we spent purposeful time with our faculty members and partners to learn about what they were experiencing and planning. We began formulating our own plans with multiple contingencies: What if we are back on campus but many of our partner organizations are not able to host students in traditional capacities? How would we need to adapt our structures if some students are back on campus and others are not, and our partners do or do not have in-person opportunities for students to serve? Clearly, the possible combinations of future reality were endless, and taking the time to consider the implications of each on our core infrastructural components was a huge task. As summer wore on and no contingency emerged as most likely, we made the program-level decision to plan for the minimum viable solution, a fall semester consisting of entirely virtual service-learning. Based on our ongoing discussions with faculty and partners alike, this at least gave them something certain to plan for despite the flux in other aspects of their planning and work.

All of this did not happen in a vacuum, and summer 2020 also brought the highly publicized state-sanctioned violence against Black and Brown bodies to the forefront of the collective consciousness through the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless others. These tragedies incited community fervor around systemic racial issues and ignited (or for some reignited) a passion for antiracism

in philosophy and practice. It also drove people's newfound or renewed interest in and desire to hold accountable systems of oppression and all those who are contributing actors within them. With the volume turned up on racial justice, a presidential election fast approaching, and a global pandemic that was further highlighting systemic inequities, there was a perfect storm of dissonance and necessity that has driven our work ever since.

Although at times all of this was frustrating and overwhelming, COVID-19's disruption of our traditional systems transformed our thought and practice to be in better alignment with our existing values and renewed focus on antiracist community engagement. In what follows, we explore the ways in which COVID-19 has forced changes to the structures we have traditionally used to form and solidify partnerships between faculty and community organizations, and how that, coupled with a reinvigorated racial justice movement, has pushed us not only to realign our practices, but also to inform them with existing wisdom and creative thinking specifically by the Black, Indigenous, person of color (BIPOC) community.

Author Positionality Statements

Based on what we discuss throughout this article, we thought it important to include author positionality statements as a way to frame our approach, highlight what lenses we bring to this conversation, and offer context for interpreting the implications we see within the broader field of community engagement in higher education.

Author 1, Dr. Becca Berkey

I identify as a White, cisgendered woman and currently serve as the director of Community-Engaged Teaching and Research at Northeastern University. I have been at this institution for 8 years and have worked in higher education for the last 16, in multiple roles at a variety of institutional types at the intersection of faculty and administration, as well as the community and the university. I am from the Midwest (Indiana) and grew up in a predominantly White community. In my adult life I have lived in Florida, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. I am an environmental sociologist and a scholar–practitioner in service-learning and community engagement, with my foundational roots in both worlds revolving around social and racial justice and community-based and participatory research and practice. Although my main role is as an administrator, I also teach community-engaged courses about food justice and community development.

Author 2, Chelsea Lauder

I am a cisgendered White woman and currently work as the program manager with Community-Engaged Teaching and Research at Northeastern University. I am from a predominantly White, Midwestern community (Wisconsin) and moved to Boston in 2015, where I earned my bachelor's degree from Northeastern University in 2019. I have been involved in local and global community engagement opportunities, including the service-learning courses and the service-learning student leadership programs as described throughout this article. My primary role is to facilitate community partnerships through community-engaged teaching and research programs, specifically through the lens of supporting community-identified goals, equity, and justice.

Literature Review

Antiracist Community Engagement With Responsible Community Partnerships

The structures we use to facilitate service-learning courses and associated partnerships are rooted in asset-based community development. This form of community development seeks to identify the strength points of a community to foster and develop social change. Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) stated that rather than focus on the deficits of a community, change makers must leverage existing gifts and wisdom in designing their development models. Although not specific to community-engaged teaching or service-learning partnerships, the application of this model in this space optimally creates structures that center community-identified goals. Moreover, partnerships that are formed on the basis of external analysis of community need (as opposed to assets) can be exploitative or extractive.

In order to facilitate quality and responsible service-learning partnerships, true collaboration must recognize the power and context between the community and

a particular institution (Mitchell, 2008). A critical perspective to service-learning must be applied to foster quality experience for students, faculty members, and community partners. When examined through a critical lens, service-learning is meant to aim toward social justice, meaning that the purposes of community partnerships cannot solely be centered on student learning and experience; rather, they must work toward a more equitable world and redistribute power. Mitchell (2008) described critical service-learning programs as ones that encourage "students to see themselves as agents of social change and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities" (p. 51). For students to be able to participate in critical service-learning, there must be a focus on building ethical community partnerships as well as preparing students for responsible engagement. As Mitchell et al. (2012) put it:

> The changing demographics of student enrollment should impel educators to examine how we implement service learning, paying attention to our biases, expectations, and traditions. Without such examination, service learning can become part of what we call a pedagogy of whiteness—strategies of instruction that consciously or unconsciously reinforce norms and privileges developed by, and for the benefit of, white people in the United States. These norms and privileges are based on color-blind and ahistorical understandings of social problems in society where race is indeed a crucial factor. Service learning projects based on a pedagogy of whiteness have minimal impact on the community and result in mis-educative experiences for students, such as unchallenged racism for White students and isolating experiences for students of color, and missed opportunities for educators to make their own instruction more transformative. (p. 613)

Given that faculty are key facilitators of these experiences, we must also consider how to optimally develop these knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors with this group. Kiely and Sexsmith's (2018) transformative S-LCE model for faculty development is instructive around the activities, faculty learning outcomes, and threshold concepts to "help faculty achieve a critically reflective and counter normative approach to S-LCE" (p. 288) in the areas of teaching and learning, institutional culture, knowledge generation and application, and community partnerships. As they further illustrate, "learning of new threshold concepts is an important area for faculty development; because these moments are rarer for faculty, they imply greater dissonance and resultant metacognitive shifts" (p. 288). Therefore, to reach the threshold concepts of critical reflection, positionality, reflexivity, and reciprocity, there need to be requisite activities not only to facilitate the faculty member's learning, but also to model how they facilitate that learning with their students.

Transformative partnerships as defined by Bringle et al. (2009) refer to university–community partnerships that display closeness, equity, and integrity as their main characteristics. In a critical service-learning program, it is essential to prioritize transformative partnerships that are not extractive, but also go beyond being solely transactional to become rooted in shared goals, marked by rich and meaningful interaction, and mutually beneficial in a way that supports community-identified goals (Bringle et al., 2009).

Service-learning and community engagement are meant to support the public good. This means that service-learning programs must adapt to larger societal movements in order to be effective as a model for social change. The convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and reinvigorated racial justice movement in 2020 presented an opportunity and a need for our work to draw more directly from the existing wisdom of BIPOC scholars. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life and, coupled with calls for racial justice around the country, increased an awareness of deeply rooted inequities in our collective social consciousness. Scholars who study structural inequality, racial justice, and equity-centered education have been rightfully brought to the forefront of conversations around methods of social change. Service-learning and community engagement must be actively antiracist, a term defined by Kendi (2019) as "any idea that suggests the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences." Without providing the historical context of how a community has been impacted by structural

inequalities and racism, service-learning experiences continue to perpetuate implicit bias, rather than dismantle systems of supremacy. Kendi's work in developing the guiding principles of being an antiracist can directly inform the ways in which critical service-learning is approached. Additionally, Rhonda Magee's *Inner Work of Racial Justice* (2019) offers powerful guidance for dismantling structures that continue to support colonialism and White supremacy.

Critical service-learning in many ways is the starting point for antiracist community engagement. Scholar Bettina Love, through her work around abolitionist teaching, calls us to take more risks, build communities "where people love, protect, and understand," and restore others' humanity (Stoltzfus, 2019). Alongside adrienne maree brown's work in *Emergent Strategy* (2017), which pushes change makers to recognize the multitude of exchanges that happen and the impact said exchanges and relationships have on the world, this powerful wisdom has guided our work as we seek to stay rooted in our values and support responsible service-learning partnerships that work toward racial justice.

The field has now needed, and committed, to make adaptations as a result of COVID-19 through the lens of antiracism as well as following best practices within the digital service-learning field. Digital service-learning, or e-service-learning, is recognized when either the instruction or service component of the course happens virtually. Typically, e-service-learning experiences are intentionally designed to incorporate the best practices of both service-learning pedagogy and online course instruction (Waldner et al., 2012). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when course instruction shifted to remote and community partner organizations that typically hosted students in-person needed to either close or shift to virtual programming, the field turned to digital service-learning for answers. Although stemming from a disruptive situation, the shift to digital service-learning has many potential benefits. For example, digital service-learning can promote digital literacy in students, extend past the limits of place-based engagement, and provide an opportunity to increase access to partnerships for various community organization types (Eaton & Leek, 2019). These benefits have encouraged us to support the intentional design and integration of digital service-learning into the courses that we support at Northeastern.

Considering our context and this review of the literature, we have the following guiding questions:

- What evidence is there when comparing fall 2019 and fall 2020 that there are new innovations in our practices? Where these differences exist, what have they resulted in (partnership-wise)?
- In what ways have these adapted structures made our work and program more accessible (how and for whom)?
- In what ways has adapting our systems for setting up course partnerships due to COVID-19 also allowed us to center antiracist community engagement?

Methodology

Given the time frame during which the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, we approached this piece primarily from the lens of reflection. That said, to achieve this goal, we loosely applied a methodological approach to exploring our questions. We utilized comparative case study (CCS) to analyze our service-learning partnerships across two specific semesters: fall 2019 and fall 2020. This orientation toward analysis allowed us to examine how the creation of our materials and processes changed as a result of COVID-19, as well as to explore the variation of responses about and results from community partnerships. As emphasized in a methodological brief about CCS, "comparative case studies are particularly useful for understanding and explaining how context influences the success of an intervention and how better to tailor the intervention to the specific context to achieve intended outcomes" (Goodrick, 2014, p. 1).

Further, CCS methodology seeks to "look at how processes unfold, often influenced by actors and events over time in different locations and at different scales" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 7). This approach moves beyond traditional case study approaches by removing the focus on bounding the case, which in many studies "is distinct from our spatially- and relationally-informed understanding of context and our processual notion of culture" because the notion

of "bounding the case from the outset" is "problematic" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 10). Finally, this approach itself is in alignment with our purposes, objectives, and questions. As Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) asserted, the CCS heuristic is also informed by a critical theoretical stance. By critical, we mean

> that the approach is guided by critical theory and its concerns and assumptions regarding power and inequality. Drawing upon Marxist, feminist, and critical race theory, among others, critical theory aims to critique inequality and change society; it studies the cultural production of structures, processes, and practices of power, exploitation, and agency; and it reveals how common-sense, hegemonic notions about the social world maintain disparities of various sorts. Attention to power and inequality is central to the CCS approach. (p. 11)

Although these authors emphasize three different axes of comparison within this approach (horizontal—of actors, documents, other influences; vertical—at different levels/scales; and transversal—over time), we focus in what follows primarily on transversal and secondarily on horizontal. Given that we are analyzing at the program level, we do not touch on vertical comparison.

For this, we examined an exhaustive list of materials that represented fall partnership planning processes so that we could examine and compare as much relevant data as possible from both the fall 2019 and fall 2020 semesters. All program data are approved for research purposes by our Institutional Review Board. Examples of these data include

- the faculty course planning form that collects information from our faculty members on the courses in which they are planning to utilize community engagement;
- resources and materials to inform community partners of the scope of opportunities when submitting to our RFP;
- the RFP form through which we collect community partner semester goals and the ways they would like to engage students in those goals;
- communication with faculty members and community partners throughout the matching and connecting process for each semester;
- updates from student leaders who support service-learning courses and report on the status of community partnerships and student engagement throughout the semester.

We analyzed additional information around our course partnership processes, from the initial interest of a service-learning faculty member to the final community partner and student evaluation at the end of the semester. We reviewed the literature and asked ourselves, "If we were looking for evidence of systems that support transformative, critical, antiracist service-learning and community engagement, what would we expect to see?" Informed by the literature, we identified the following four key characteristics to search for evidence of in comparing our program records from fall 2019 to fall 2020:

1. Tighter values alignment
2. More ethical and transformative partnerships
3. Potential for greater community impact
4. Relational accountability in our community-engaged teaching partnerships

In our process we examined how the unique materials from fall 2019 and fall 2020 did or did not showcase evidence of these markers and then analyzed the change over time across the two semesters. This would allow us not only to see how the unique materials highlighted the key markers above, but also to view the broader arc of our shifted thinking as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice movement.

Initial Findings and Results

Through the process described above, we combed through our programmatic data for evidence of these four characteristics (and to identify where gaps existed). Table 1 summarizes our findings.

In reviewing the materials above we found evidence of how the disruption that COVID-19 presented to our traditional infrastructural elements also impacted our community partnerships to showcase the four key

Table 1. Summary Review of Programmatic Data Evidence Areas, Comparison Fall 2019 (FA19) and Fall 2020 (FA20)

	Tighter values alignment (1)	More ethical and transformative partnerships (2)	Potential for greater community impact (3)	Relational accountability in our community-engaged teaching partnerships (4)
Faculty course planning form* *Sent out pre-COVID for FA20, but there is some evidence of change.	FA20 includes reasoning for the shift of our semesterly partnership orientation event—this was partially to better center the value of relationship building.	In FA20 we put greater emphasis on faculty members to communicate with past partners and highlight whether they would like to continue for future semesters.		Questions are framed to increase accountability for faculty members with their parners.
RFP outline/ application	FA20 materials asked community partners to submit a goal and/or interest rather than an application; sought to capture the root of reasoning behind the partnership to enhance cocreation. FA19 asked for specific reasonings behind collaboration; FA20 called for open responses to more easily see the realm of possibility.	FA20 left more space for goals rather than just student roles looking to be filled. Needed to be both more flexible and direct about options due to shift to digital S-L; these materials communicated the shift well while highlighting partnership.	Ask more targeted questions about community goals; evidence of better attention to the specific needs/ goals of community organizations due to COVID-19.	
Course one-pagers	FA20 course one-pagers were made public for more courses to show greater transparency in how partnerships could be made. Allowed more community partners to access information such as "Why are you integrating service-learning into your course" and partnership expectations prior to submitting.	Although we used these for some classes in past semesters, we created them for all classes seeking partners for FA20 and used them to better showcase the ways faculty could collaborate, which highlights stronger responsible partnerships.		Asking more faculty members (specifically in FA20) to publicly write out their reasoning and partnership expectations supports relationship accountability.

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Table 1 Continued

	Tighter values alignment (1)	More ethical and transformative partnerships (2)	Potential for greater community impact (3)	Relational accountability in our community-engaged teaching partnerships (4)
Faculty listening session notes	Centered listening/ understanding of faculty goals as we planned for FA20 in the midst of COVID-19.	Encouraged faculty to think early and often about how to partner with organizations in a way we just didn't directly communicate or have time to talk about in past semesters. More intentional time spent together as a result of COVID 19.		
Community partner listening session notes	FA20 listening sessions were more intentional in figuring out needs of partners for this semester as a result of COVID-19.	FA20, as a result of COVID-19—but now something we are continuing for SP21—brought partners into the planning process earlier to make sure it made sense for their goals/ needs.	Hosting them in FA20 helped us get a better sense of what community partners were prioritizing.	
Startup communication (preparing for the semester)	FA20 has evidence of listening sessions, resources for conversations, and specific action-oriented next steps for faculty and community partners to really align with our values of centering their voices.			There is evidence of a marked difference here, particularly in the way the shift to digital S-L was communicated.
Weekly updates from S-LTAs FA19 and FA20	There is evidence of this just in the depth between FA19 and FA20—a comparison between the weekly updates in both shows that there is much more focus on preparing students & social/ racial justice in FA20.	As stated in other areas, it just seems as though we're getting so much more information in FA20 about what is happening and about the impact of these partnerships.	There seems to be evidence in FA20 (as opposed to FA19) that more of the student leaders are focusing in their updates on how to ensure that the students in their classes are *getting* what it means to work with the community and the potential contributions of what they're doing	As stated in other areas, it just seems as though we're getting so much more information in FA20 about what is happening and about the impact of these partnerships.

characteristics as discussed. In some cases, however, we saw that there had already been a shift in our approach. This became apparent in comparing fall 2019 and fall 2020 faculty course planning materials. There was already a clear movement toward values alignment through the language and accountability for faculty members in regard to their partnerships. Our Faculty Course Planning form for fall 2020 was created prior to COVID-19, but the follow-up and shift to having greater flexibility for both faculty and community partners ultimately allowed for deeper, more intentional relationships. In some other areas, this comparative approach highlighted gaps that will allow us to be more proactive in our work to better align with our objectives.

Key evidence existed in our RFP materials, which, as described above, are central to building our program's responsible community partnerships. In comparing fall 2019 and fall 2020 we found increased use of language that highlighted flexibility and collaboration, as opposed to a strict structure into which only a certain type of partner could fit. For example, in our responses to the RFP we had an increase in neighborhood and community-member-focused goals and fewer specific direct service needs. This is a direct result of COVID-19 unearthing the need for more intentional partnership, rather than just an exchange of human capital. The format of our RFP in fall 2020 aptly resembled the intended goal of being a submission form rather than a formal application. In addition, our RFP in fall 2020 clearly outlined the shift to virtual engagement and provided guidance rather than dictating the types of engagement that could occur.

Following our partnership set-up processes and communication, we reviewed how materials from our S-LTAs, who directly support and report on service-learning partnerships throughout the semester, had shifted. In the courses that ran in both fall 2019 and fall 2020, we saw student leader updates that had a greater focus on critical service-learning as opposed to traditional service-learning (Mitchell, 2008). For example, S-LTAs shared deeper analysis of their students' partner engagement in updates in fall 2020 than in fall 2019, which provides evidence that our student leader program had greater intentionality around this after adaptations resulting from COVID-19. We provide further details of how these initial findings manifest in the four key characteristics across the fall 2019 and fall 2020 semesters in the discussion.

Discussion

Tighter Values Alignment

In every data source, we were able to identify ways our program documentation had shifted to reflect tighter alignment with our values. This shows up in two significant ways (see Table 1)—the first through a theme of listening to our stakeholders, or really taking the time to slow down, ask what was needed, connect as humans, and figure out a way forward together. brown's work in emergent strategy (2017) really highlights the need to recognize how each individual's relationships and creativity contribute to the broader picture of human networks. In pausing to connect with one another, at a time when staying connected felt more difficult than ever, we found a way to hold true to our values. The second way this emerges is through an acknowledgment of more focus on preparing students for engagement as well as in training around racial and social justice as it intersects with community engagement and specifically the role our student leaders play in facilitating it. For example, in fall 2020 we saw this evidence from an S-LTA in a weekly update: "I also led a discussion about 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack' by Peggy McIntosh. I thought it went well, as this can be a tough topic to discuss, but students were willing to join in." In training our student leaders on how to frame service-learning in the classroom with a focus on systemic issues and race, which is deemed necessary through Mitchell et al.'s (2012) work, we were able to highlight critical service-learning in many aspects of our programming.

It was not that we weren't listening to our stakeholders or providing training opportunities for our student leaders to consider these important topics prior to the pandemic, but the COVID-19 context increased the relevance and resonance of this work. Additionally, it necessitated that we take time in the midst of chaos to connect to people in our network as they navigated their own complex lives and roles in very apparent ways. Although we have always valued this type of authentic and genuine relationship building, this new context provided the opportunity to connect human-

to-human in ways we previously had not.

In all of this, we are reminded of the importance of truly reimagining systems, not simply adapting them for these current times. Rather than simply inject our values into our already fully formed operations, both our team and the broader field should evolve to a place where the operations themselves are dismantled, reexamined, and reconstituted in ways that will allow this work to respond and emerge along with the world around it.

More Ethical and Transformative Partnerships

A key programmatic goal and deeply held value in our operations is to build more ethical and transformative partnerships. We had been working toward this goal prior to the disruption of COVID-19 on our systems and heightened national calls for racial justice. In Table 1 you can see how our multiple structures of partnership building, both prior to a semester and throughout, show evidence of creating more ethical and transformative partnerships, as defined by Bringle et al. (2009). The key themes for how these changes occurred are (1) more intentional asks and communication with faculty members and (2) restructuring the language and format of our centralized RFP process.

Faculty development is a key part of our team's work, and we have specifically cultivated a network of faculty members who not only see the benefit for students to engaging with the community, but who have a more specific affinity for or interest in community impact and social justice. At our university, which heavily focuses on experiential learning opportunities for students, we have created structures for faculty to decide whether service-learning is the best pedagogical method for them. Beginning in fall 2019, we piloted an interactive, online Faculty Onboarding Module that more thoroughly describes our specific purpose and supports. With this module, coupled with faculty listening sessions in summer 2020 that allowed us to hear the specific goals, questions, and concerns of our faculty members going into the fall 2020 semester, we have been able to curate a more intentional and informed faculty network and tailor resources to these specific questions. As described through the literature that asserts engaged faculty are more likely to support responsible partnerships, this evidence from our fall 2020 semester aligned with our intended outcomes (Bringle et al., 2009).

With a large network of courses, faculty, and students being supported through our work each semester, it has been essential to create systems and structure that allow our small team to do this work more effectively and efficiently. Over time we have worked to automate various systems so that there has been increased time to work toward other goals. Through the disruption of COVID-19 we were motivated to reimagine our work in a way that could adapt to the needs of our network. This meant being more flexible and recognizing different types of service-learning that we potentially would not have imagined previously. Even as we kept parts of our structures the same to hold onto the image of our processes, we upended our timeline and expectations. For example, in our fall 2020 RFP reminder emails we wrote this:

> In order to be flexible both in process and time as we prepare for the fall, we have shifted our submission timeline. An African American artist and poet, Ashley Bryan, uses the term "lifeline" in place of deadline, and we want to do the same here. Our new priority lifeline will be Wednesday, July 8th. Please utilize the "intent to partner" option (you will see it when you start the form and enter your contact information) if you are still working through how you might want to partner in the fall—this option will allow us to streamline follow up throughout the summer as more pieces fall into place.

In addition to this language shift from "deadlines" to "lifelines," which was inspired by an artist and poet from the BIPOC community, the language around the RFP submission process was altered as well. As a comparison, in fall 2019 we simply wrote, "Don't Forget to Apply by June 24th! Partner with Service-Learning in Fall 2019—The Fall 2019 Request for Partnerships Application is now open!"

In order to frame the RFP as more approachable and goal-oriented, rather than an application by which you are "accepted" to work with us, our fall 2020 RFP described

the process as a submission form:

> Fall 2020 Service-Learning Request for Partnerships now available for community-based organizations: Our Fall 2020 Request for Partnerships process has been adapted to represent a fully digital/virtual semester of service-learning. Our submission form gives you the option to submit an "intent to partner" or a full submission for the Fall. Please review the information documents to familiarize yourself with our process.

The purpose is to highlight the cocreation of partnerships, rather than (even if unintentionally) perpetuate an "us versus them" mentality of community versus university stakeholders. Particularly in the case of our urban university, our students are residents of the primary communities with whom we collaborate. This shift in language was in large part due to the desire to promote authenticity and equity in our partnerships. By doing this, specific course partnerships through which students engage were seen as more impactful toward students' learning. For example, a student in fall 2020 who engaged virtually with a community partner via the course Education in the Community stated:

> I learned that I need to reevaluate my own biases when it comes to education. It really made me think deeper about what I believe education is and how it should be executed, compared to how it actually is around the world.

This is just one example from many reflections captured through our Service-Learning Virtual EXPO that showcases how service-learning, when facilitated critically and intentionally, can generate greater student learning.

Our community partnerships are truly the soul of our work; they are where the cocreation of student experience and community impact exist, and it is a primary commitment of our team to prioritize responsible and ethical partnerships. Considering the ways in which COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, and specifically the communities around Northeastern, which are composed of primarily people of color, we feel an urgency in our commitment to ensuring that our community partnerships are rooted in building social justice long term, and not just through the semester-long student interactions.

Potential for Greater Community Impact

Measuring community impact beyond the experiences of community organizations hosting students is always a challenging component of our work. With many of our interactions being rooted in the shared goals defined by an organization and faculty member, it is not always easy to see more deeply into how these partnerships are creating greater community impact. In fall 2019 we received this response from one community partner:

> We were able to host weekly intergenerational programs in 17 different elder residential buildings or senior centers across the City of Boston. We couldn't have expanded the number of buildings we were in without the students' commitment, involvement or language skills!

Although this evaluation response represents the impact that service-learning partnerships had on our partner organization's programming, we saw less direct response to how the engagement created community impact beyond organizational capacity. In comparison, a partner with engagement very similar to that described in fall 2019, but virtual, shared this in their fall 2020 evaluation:

> The talks with our volunteers helped our foster grandparents feel happy and have a connection to mitigate social isolation. The students bring new perspectives, "fresh air" to our volunteers. They talked about traveling to China & holidays. They were able to build good relationships in the short time they were together.

Our partner final evaluations, in which not all community partner organizations participate, are our main source of measuring community impact. Again, we already considered community impact a priority, but the tandem occurrence of the pandemic and heightened calls for racial justice pushed us to unearth ways to more intentionally set up partnerships for both increasing impact and measuring that impact.

Other evidence of direct community impact comes from anecdotes from community partners and students. In seeing the impact of COVID-19 on our communities, we struggled to find evidence of ways that our partnerships would or would not be a successful intervention in direct community impact. Although we could see increased potential in some spaces between fall 2019 and fall 2020, the lack of evidence around this will certainly guide our coming work. Our Office of City and Community Engagement, specifically, is committed in its 2020–2021 goals to work toward intentionally building relationships with community members, neighbors, and residents in order to adapt our programming in a way that is directly informed by the community.

Relationship Accountability in Our Community-Engaged Teaching Partnerships

The emphasis on relationship accountability in our community-engaged teaching partnerships stems from the priority attached to supporting cocreation with community partners. In order for collaborations to embody the characteristics of transformative partnerships, they must be rooted in shared goals, and those goals and expectations must be met through relationship accountability (Clayton et al., 2010). While our team acts as the through line that expands past just one semester, course, or faculty member, with community partnerships we require that our service-learning faculty members hold themselves and their students accountable to a partner on a particular collaboration. Evidence of this accountability is not systematically tracked and is therefore difficult to obtain directly. Table 1 represents how we were unable to see this directly reflected in our data sources, but anecdotally we have heard community partners and faculty members share that they feel partnerships have been easier to manage during fall 2020 because the virtual space has led toward more accessibility. For example, one fall 2020 faculty member said of her service-learning course experience, "I think doing things over Zoom has actually made working with community partners even more accessible, as it requires asking less of a time commitment from each of our partners."

The sense that partners have been more accessible, making the relationship accountability more direct, is evidence of how restructuring our work as a result of COVID-19 has impacted us. In addition, we found instances where initial recommendations to faculty members about partnerships through our RFP instigated more creative conversations and then resulted in meaningful partnership. This result is in part due to the more personalized emails sent out to faculty members about their partnership options, rather than utilizing a stock email with instructions.

Even though tracking relationship accountability is difficult to represent in our data sources, it has always been an important part of our partnership tracking process. Considering the unknowns and challenges of the fall 2020 semester, our team has tried to build in systems as we go to set ourselves up for supporting greater accountability in future semesters.

Implications

The Changing Landscape of Community Engagement in Higher Education

In their 2012 article "The Centrality of Engagement in Higher Education," Fitzgerald et al. stated:

> Through engagement with local and broader communities, we seek a means to expand and shift from the established internally focused, discipline-based framework of higher education to a framework focused on a stronger level of societal relevance that improves both society and the overarching goals of higher education. (p. 7)

Additionally, they built on and referenced the work of the Kellogg Commission (2001) in developing a seven-part test of engagement that includes questions around (1) responsiveness, (2) respect for partners, (3) academic neutrality, (4) accessibility, (5) integration, (6) coordination, and (7) resource partnerships.

Never in recent memory has there been a year like 2020, one where we were faced with a global pandemic that also spurred an economic downturn and closed many of the on-campus components of higher education, where there were so many visible calls and so much organizing for racial justice, where we saw the impacts of political divisiveness on our presidential election,

and so much more. As the field revisits the call made by Fitzgerald et al. and the test of engagement developed by the Kellogg Commission, and with the world around us changing rapidly, our communities reeling, and our neighbors struggling, it becomes clear that for community engagement in higher education to work toward its broader public purpose, it must adapt. In fact, it must adapt *despite* the challenges our individual institutions are facing.

In addition to this changing landscape, it is clear that much of the knowledge and wisdom offered graciously by the BIPOC community aligns with our most ambitious justice-oriented goals as a field. There is a need to integrate and center these voices as we make the adaptations necessitated by our ever-changing context. As a field, we cannot afford to lose sight of these voices and the systemic inequity that drives them, and to examine what we do first from the perspective of how we might be contributing to those very systems of oppression rather than alleviating them.

Implications for Practice Within Community-Engaged Teaching and Research

Like many in the broader field, at Northeastern we find our programming and partnership efforts at a crossroads. We can wait for this storm to pass so we can return to the "way things were," or we can emerge with the lessons learned through this disruption to truly reimagine what, how, and why we do what we do. The comparative case study approach was an illuminating methodology for exploring whether we were shifting practice in alignment with our values and goals the way we assumed we were, and illustrated that in some ways we were, but in others we were not. We will go through this exercise at regular intervals in the future (disruption aside) to continually check for progress toward the characteristics we identified, and to modify those characteristics as more emerges at the intersections of antiracism and community engagement. We further suggest that other institutions might adapt or utilize this model for their own purposes.

One practice that emerged as central is listening and making sure that listening and adaptations are performed in ongoing, formal, and informal ways. The success of this strategy in moving toward the characteristics we identified (particularly tighter values alignment) solidifies that it should be a continued, intentional part of our focus even after this disruption. After the pandemic we intend to maintain both virtual engagement as an option, since this has allowed us to engage with more partners, and the shift in our processes to revolve around community-identified goals rather than logistics/scheduling.

In addition, even as we saw ample evidence of how our systems and structures have shifted to support and reflect more ethical and transformative partnerships, we saw less in our work that illustrated a focus on potential for greater community impact and relational accountability in our community-engaged teaching partnerships. These gaps highlight areas we can focus on in our program in the future, creating tools and systems to foster these areas as well as assess them. Additionally, they are not unlike the challenges faced in community engagement work at many institutions.

Future Paths for Scholarship

As the field considers how to work toward methods and practices of antiracist community engagement, we must also continue to research how (or whether) service-learning contributes to broader diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and initiatives in our institutions (particularly as they pertain to the recruitment, retention, and recognition of women faculty and faculty of color, as well as students from historically marginalized groups) as well as our communities.

We know, for example, that women and faculty of color are more likely to engage in community-based scholarship and/or teaching. Antonio (2002) found that "faculty of color are 75% more likely than white faculty to pursue a position in the academy because they draw a connection between the professoriate and the ability to effect change in society" (pp. 593–594). Research has also shown the impact of service-learning on students from historically marginalized groups. As Mungo (2017) highlighted about this pedagogical approach:

> It was found to improve graduation rates for all students regardless of their racial/ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, by increasing the number of students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds who graduate, service-learning results in increasing graduation rates of students of

> color, thereby decreasing the retention and graduation rate gaps. (p. 48)

This reflective essay also suggests that there is utility in further exploring the impact of utilizing student leaders as partners in facilitating service-learning courses on the dynamics discussed above. Begley et al. (2019) discussed how partnering with S-LTAs impacted faculty members facilitating service-learning courses, and found that it had an effect not only in easing the logistical components of such an approach, but also on faculty members' understanding and implementation of this practice in their teaching. Beyond this, researching the impact on a student's professional journey of student leadership opportunities rooted in antiracist community engagement outside their coursework would be a rich line for future inquiry.

Although it is essential to continue to study the impacts of integrating and valuing service-learning and community engagement on faculty and students at our institutions, more attention is needed around the actual impact of this work and these partnerships on the most marginalized members of our communities and/or the most pressing issues they face. To truly move past disruption and its heightened impacts on those most vulnerable in our communities, as a field we must develop more sophisticated ways of measuring and understanding the impacts of our work (not just the intentions that guide it). Without doing this, we fail to recognize what Love (2019) described:

> Pedagogy should work in tandem with students' own knowledge of their community and grassroots organizations to push forward new ideas for social change, not just be a tool to enhance test scores or grades. Pedagogy, regardless of its name, is useless without teachers dedicated to challenging systemic oppression with intersectional social justice.

There is no time that this is more true than when our communities are stressed to their maximum levels by multiple coinciding disruptions that deepen inequity and are outside their control.

Finally, the guiding questions of this comparative case study unearth another line of potential questioning for future research specifically for program administrators about whether or not (and how much, if so) programmatic policies, processes, and wraparound support and development can move the needle toward truly antiracist community engagement efforts on the part of all involved stakeholders.

Conclusion

As we have reflected on and researched the ways in which our work has been altered as a result of COVID-19, we see many opportunities for more deeply rooting our service-learning partnerships in critical service-learning theory and the wisdom of BIPOC scholars. Although often overwhelming and difficult to see beyond, COVID-19 has enabled us to tighten values alignment, support more ethical and responsible partnerships, foster potential for greater community impact, and increase relationship accountability in the partnerships we support. We have clear evidence of the ways in which we have achieved these accomplishments; further, we have been offered an opportunity to improve how we might continue this movement in the future. The disruption caused by COVID-19 in 2020, coupled with a call for racial justice and the dismantling of systems of oppression, has pushed us—and will continue to push us—to find new synergies in our work for building transformative community partnerships through service-learning and the centering of antiracist community engagement.

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Critical, Interdisciplinary, and Collaborative Approaches to Virtual Community-Engaged Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Unrest in the Twin Cities

Emily Seru

Abstract

A women's university in Minnesota responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest in the Twin Cities provides a setting to explore ways in which critical, interdisciplinary, and collaborative campus approaches to virtual community-engaged courses and research bring focus to student learning and broaden the scope of collective university impact on urgent and emerging community issues. Three campus community engagement initiatives focusing on racial housing segregation, voting rights, and incarcerated women show the interplay and cumulative impact of curricular, cocurricular, and campuswide responses to systemic injustice. Drawing on interviews with faculty members, student evaluations, and community partner reflections, the author reflects on what can be learned from the adaptations represented in these three community-engaged initiatives during a time of crisis with critical and collective community and campus response.

Keywords: community-engaged learning, critical service-learning, virtual service-learning, community engagement professionals, campus-based initiatives, project-based service-learning

Like many community and civic engagement centers on university campuses across the country, the Center for Community Work and Learning at St. Catherine University (St. Kate) in St. Paul, Minnesota, was called to respond to and help students to reflect and make meaning of the growing social unrest sparked by systemic inequalities revealing themselves in the uneven community impacts of the pandemic; the same systemic inequalities, especially racial inequalities, that quite literally lit the Twin Cities on fire in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. St. Catherine University's mission is to value and integrate the liberal arts and professional education within the Catholic intellectual tradition, to center women's education, and to emphasize scholarly inquiry and social justice teaching as lived by our founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. The unrest amplified the university's clarion call for critical social justice frameworks and a focus on systemic inequalities as a campus community and in the classroom.

Established in 2000, St. Catherine University's Center for Community Work and Learning houses student employment programs and service-learning course leadership; it is also the hub for the campus Civic Engagement Collective. The Center employs four staff members and on average six to eight student coordinators. The Center is unique in that it supports both curricular and cocurricular community engagement efforts. The three student employment programs include paid internships with local nonprofits, a tutoring program with area schools and afterschool programs, and an assistantship program that pairs students with a faculty or staff mentor to work on research or as a teaching assistant. The service-learning coursework supports on

average 100 community-engaged courses a year from undergraduate to graduate, across many disciplines.

St. Catherine University is the largest private women's college in the nation and has a diverse student population. The incoming undergraduate 2020 class is over 50% multicultural; 42% of St. Kate's students are Pell Grant eligible; and 31% are first-generation college students. Community-engaged learning that is embedded in courses at St. Catherine University is accessible to this community of students who have many work and family obligations outside the classroom that could prevent them from participating in unpaid cocurricular activities, or more traditional service-learning that has a set number of individual hours that students must document on site with a local community partner. In a March 2020 Annual Current Student Survey conducted by the university, 86% of graduating College for Women students indicated that they had participated in at least one community-engaged course. Students also indicated that their greatest level of connections and engagement at St. Kate's happened within classroom discussions and activities in the classroom. For all of these reasons, service-learning at St. Kate's, even before COVID, relied heavily on in-class time for community-engaged group projects, or one or two on-site experiences tied to larger reflection and sometimes civic or advocacy assignments connected to a community issue. The community-engaged courses that ran virtually during the pandemic built on what had been working for students before and allowed students to stay engaged, even when taking their classes from a thousand miles away from the university, or while supporting their younger siblings' virtual school day.

This reflective essay offers the opportunity to practice what we encourage our students to do every day—to reflect critically on lived experiences and what can be learned and applied in future work and learning. Some of the questions that the experiences during the pandemic raise for me, and for the field of community-engaged learning in the future, include

1. Can virtual service-learning projects increase the accessibility of service-learning for more students who may not otherwise be able to take time outside class and travel to on-site partner sites?
2. Does the coordination of multiple community-engaged courses within a larger multiyear project and social justice theme increase the ability of faculty to deepen aspects of critical service-learning in ways they would not otherwise be able to?
3. To what extent can multiple community-engaged courses aligned across semesters have a cumulative positive impact on a community-based or campuswide social justice project or effort?

Three Community Engagement Initiatives

Here I explore three community engagement initiatives at St. Catherine University during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and how collaborative, interdisciplinary virtual projects impacted collective impact, student engagement, and attention to critical service-learning tenets of social justice and critical consciousness. I explore these initiatives as a way of unpacking the themes: (1) Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? collaboration, (2) the Women's Prison Book Project letter-writing campaign, and (3) the women's suffrage centennial. From these examples, the article will share what implications our learning holds for the field of community-engaged learning in higher education.

Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? Collaboration

The University of Minnesota's Mapping Prejudice (https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu/) builds on the work of others who have begun to create digital maps of historical housing inequities. Racial covenants were legal clauses embedded in property deeds that barred people who were not White from buying or occupying land and homes in specific areas. Although these covenants are now illegal, much of the residential segregation patterns and the structural inequalities that resulted persist today. Documentary filmmaker Daniel Bergin told the story of racialized housing discrimination in the Twin Cities in his Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) original documentary *Jim Crow of the North* (https://www.tpt.org/minnesota-experience/video/jim-crow-of-the-north-stijws/). For a number of years, the Center for Community Work and Learning connected students to the Mapping Prejudice efforts within Hennepin

County that included having students look at scanned housing deeds to identify and track the racial covenants within the deeds to build the map that was the first ever visual representation of racial covenants in an American city.

"Welcoming the Dear Neighbor?" (https://welcomingthedearneighbor.org/) is the name of St. Catherine University's work in Ramsey County in collaboration with Mapping Prejudice. The name is a nod to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, who claim the love of the dear neighbor without distinction as part of their mission. The project focus is to help community members gain a better understanding of housing segregation and subsequent racial inequalities in Ramsey County, where the capital city of St. Paul and the St. Catherine University campus reside. The project seeks to learn more about the stories of legal housing segregation in the past in order to better understand our present context and influence better policies in the future. Starting in 2019, History and Political Science professors worked with student researchers—employed through a cocurricular Community Work and Learning program—conducting archival research on how the St. Paul newspapers reported issues of housing and race in order to illuminate this hidden history and the stories alongside the map as well as research to scan and map racial housing deeds in the neighborhood surrounding the University's St. Paul campus.

As COVID-19 cases began to spike in Minnesota over the summer of 2020, the Center for Community Work and Learning made the hard call that all service-learning would be performed in a virtual-only format for the foreseeable future. However, we quickly realized that the work of the Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? collaboration was well-situated to respond to the need for community-engaged learning when many of our local nonprofit partners were not in a place to support new virtual service-learning projects. This university-wide initiative offered the university community a tangible effort to work on together to address issues of systemic inequalities. It could include not only students, but also alumni, local neighborhood associations, and the broader public. After George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis and thousands took to the streets to protest police racial violence, community interest in contributing to the Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? collaboration grew. The group set up weekly sessions throughout the spring, summer, and fall to introduce people to the effort and walk them through the process of looking through a digitized housing deed for a racial covenant.

The growing need for virtual service-learning work across many St. Catherine University courses, coupled with an interest in service-learning projects that help students to look at systems and power dynamics in meaningful and authentic ways, made this project a natural fit for the times. Staff with the Center for Community Work and Learning created a flexible Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? module for faculty to plug into their syllabi that helped to set the context for the history of racialized housing discrimination in the Twin Cities, led students through reflection and perspective-taking exercises, and then facilitated students through the deed transcription process so that they could contribute to building out the Ramsey County map. The early research by the faculty and students uncovered racial covenants in the neighborhood surrounding the university, making the project even more personal for participating students.

Between the summer and fall sessions of 2020, 10 service-learning courses and nearly 200 students participated in the Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? collaboration. Together they transcribed over 150 housing deeds, identifying racial covenants in houses that contributed to the early completion of a Ramsey County map visualizing the history and legacy of racial housing segregation in the area. This data was then overlaid with neighborhoods with high risks for COVID infections to demonstrate the public health impacts of systemic inequities, supporting calls for advocacy and change to close these gaps. The community-engaged courses participating in these efforts spanned the disciplines and schools at the university and included students from first-year seminars, graduate occupational therapy, physical therapy, sociology, data science, public health, digital storytelling, and economics courses. Faculty members interviewed commented that having a common project that addressed issues of systemic injustice was a critical component to their students' engagement. In final student evaluations, 98% of students responded that they agreed or strongly

agreed that the service-learning project enhanced what they learned in the course. Students' responses from final evaluations in summer and fall 2020 indicate that the service-learning project contributed to their understanding of systemic racial inequities:

> I learned so much!! I was skeptical about doing this course online but I really enjoyed it. The discussions my class had were some of the most insightful I have been a part of in a long time.
>
> This partnership was a great experience as it was a crash course in building our advocacy skills which are very important to the profession, but something I don't have much experience with.
>
> I think the service-learning really opened my eyes to the structural racism embedded in the community around us.
>
> Mapping Prejudice project helped me better understand the how and why of our community's history

Women's Prison Book Project Letter-Writing Campaign

Like many universities, St. Catherine University has a tradition of a One Read; a book selected for the campus to read together and engage with over the course of a year. The 2020 One Read for Racial Justice selection for the year was *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, the powerful 2003 book by scholar and activist Angela Davis that explores the history of incarceration and makes a case for the abolition of prisons. St. Catherine University has a required first-year seminar, The Reflective Woman (TRW), that every College for Women and College for Adults student takes during their first year. Many TRW faculty members assigned the whole book or chapters of it as required reading to their students in the fall 2020 semester, and the St. Catherine University library staff had built out a resource page for faculty interested in incorporating the book into their classes.

The Reflective Woman course has three main course units: Composing a Life, Searching for Truth, and Working Towards Community and Justice. The third unit challenges students to understand social justice and take action for the common good. Many of the faculty who teach TRW incorporate a service-learning component to accompany this last unit, as the experience brings alive issues of social justice and offers opportunities for students to gain hands-on experiences working directly with campus and community partners to address social justice issues, as well as the intentional classroom space for meaningful group reflection on that experience. Facing the possibility of disengaged first-year students in a virtual classroom, and the social unrest over the summer leading to contested discussions in the Twin Cities about police abolition, TRW faculty members were eager for service-learning projects within this unit that would allow their students to engage with the current issues in meaningful ways, even if it meant doing so in a virtual format.

The Center for Community Work and Learning has a long-standing relationship with the Women's Prison Book Project (https://wpbp.org/), a volunteer-run nonprofit based in Minneapolis. Since 1994, the Women's Prison Book Project (WPBP) has provided women and transgender persons in prison free reading materials covering a wide range of topics from law and education to fiction, politics, history, and women's health. They seek to build connections with those behind the walls and to educate those on the outside about the realities of prison and the justice system. St. Catherine University service-learning students had worked over the years with the WPBP, packing books for incarcerated women and transgender individuals all over the United States who make requests through the WPBP network.

During the pandemic, the WPBP could no longer hold in-person volunteer book-packing sessions. The collective members were also keenly aware of the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on incarcerated individuals all over the country. They created a letter-writing campaign in place of their regular book delivery as a way of staying connected to their incarcerated members, letting them know they were not alone, and to solicit their responses to questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdowns on their lived experiences in jails and prisons. This opportunity provided a way for St. Catherine University students to connect with, support, and learn from a unique community impacted during the pandemic. They were

also able to learn about the criminal justice system and the health and human rights impacts that policies responding to the virus were having on incarcerated women and transgender individuals. The Center for Community Work and Learning and the WPBP created a service-learning module for TRW faculty to incorporate into their classrooms as a class project. This module included readings and online resources for students to learn about incarceration and the criminal justice system, prereflection exercises to help students think about their own lived experiences and worldviews, and an introduction to the work of the WPBP and the goals of the letter-writing campaign.

Seven first-year TRW courses participated in the WPBP project, along with a graduate occupational therapy class and an undergraduate sociology class. Together, the students in these courses sent over 700 letters to incarcerated women and transgender individuals all over the United States. With the letters they also sent blank coloring pages created by local artist and activist Ricardo Levins Morales (https://www.rlmartstudio.com/) and a series of questions asking how the recipients' lives had been impacted in prison by the pandemic.

In response, hundreds of letters started to come from incarcerated individuals all over the country describing the living conditions during the pandemic and expressing words of hope and solidarity for others. The WPBP collective members transcribed dozens of these letters that a few St. Catherine University courses then reviewed and coded for themes that were emerging about the experiences and conditions in the prisons. This coding work was both useful to the WPBP members in the short term, and will be built upon in the months to come to identify potential points of advocacy efforts that the collective may choose to organize their members around. For the students, reading the letters after having sent their own brought the project full circle, deepened their understanding of the issues incarcerated individuals face, and raised their critical awareness of their own lived experiences as they related to the criminal justice system. Even though the process of assembling and sending letter-writing packets to each of the 100+ students participating in the project was a challenge, the tactile act of writing an "old-fashioned" letter proved to be very meaningful for many students. They were then able to reflect together as a learning community in their virtual classroom spaces. Students and faculty reflected that the shared experience brought feelings of connection at a time when they were physically distanced from campus and from each other.

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Women's Suffrage Movement

The Civic Engagement Collective's work is a campuswide effort with student leadership and staff and faculty engagement from both academic and student affairs. The efforts of the collective during this last election cycle included voter education and engagement with students in virtual formats such as the Popcorn and Politics event and social media campaigns. St. Catherine University has long had a robustly engaged student body when it comes to voting. Although the results reflecting student participation in the 2020 elections are not yet available, the most recent National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE; https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve) report indicated that St. Catherine University students have been voting at a much higher rate than college students across the nation. In 2018, St. Kate's students garnered a voting rate of 60.1%, compared to the 2018 voting rate of 39.1% for all institutions (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2019).

The presidential election season of 2020 also marked the centennial anniversary of the women's suffrage movement. The university had plans to showcase the suffrage centennial and the stories often not told of local women of color in the movement through campuswide educational and engagement efforts. University partner and filmmaker Daniel Bergin's 2020 TPT documentary *Citizen* (https://www.tpt.org/citizen/) highlights the diverse group of Minnesota women's suffrage leaders as well as current voter engagement. Just before the pandemic, during the presidential primary in March, TPT's all-female film crew visited the St. Catherine University campus to film service-learning students in a classroom, voter education around campus, and the voter van with students to head out to the local polling location. This footage, along with interviews with St. Catherine University faculty members, became an integral part of the documentary. Due in part to the close connections between the film and the St. Catherine University student and faculty involvement, fall 2020 plans had originally

included hosting the premiere of the *Citizen* documentary at the O'Shaughnessy Theater located on the university campus. When the pandemic hit, the interdisciplinary campus planning team switched gears and worked with TPT to embed the film within the Integrated Learning Series (https://www.stkate.edu/events/integrated-learning-series). The Integrated Learning Series is a campuswide initiative that brings together scholars, community members, and the campus community to activate the liberal arts pedagogy. The series has included multimedia performances, speakers, events, and public dialogues on a range of social justice themes. The virtual Zoom events during October explored the challenges and tensions within the suffrage story, including the exclusion of women of color and Native women from gaining the right to vote with the 19th Amendment. The virtual showing of *Citizen* and Q&A with filmmaker Daniel Bergin in October engaged nearly 300 people within the campus community. It also showcased local artist Leslie Barlow's suffrage portraits, which St. Kate's was able to acquire on loan for our academic year and are displayed in our student center building as well as online (http://gallery.stkate.edu/exhibitions/minnesota-suffragists).

As with the other campuswide initiatives, the suffrage centennial became a focus point for multiple service-learning courses across disciplines. Laying the groundwork for this deeper effort was a fall semester 2019 honors class, Nevertheless She Persisted. Cotaught by Communication Studies and History faculty members, the course worked with the Minnesota History Center's senior exhibit developer on their suffrage centennial exhibit. Each student was assigned an individual or an organization in the suffrage movement in Minnesota to research at the Minnesota History Center (https://www.mnhs.org/historycenter). This course and their involvement with both the TPT *Citizen* documentary and with the suffrage centennial led to other service-learning courses building on the partnerships and incorporating service-learning projects appropriate to the course discipline. These courses continued their service-learning projects virtually in the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, and they showcased the diversity of approaches to the virtual engagement.

A public relations writing course had students write essays about suffrage topics, which appeared on the TPT website in support of the *Citizen* documentary. An art and technology class created digital content related to the suffrage movement. A fashion course had students create original designs inspired by the suffrage movement, ranging from historical and cultural interpretations to symbolic statements about current voter engagement struggles; their work was featured and aired online by TPT Originals (https://www.tptoriginals.org/explore-the-fashion-choices-of-suffragists-who-fought-for-the-19th-amendment/). Communications students added their written reflections on the suffrage movement past and present for a TPT collection titled "Then & Now: Reflections on Women's Suffrage" (https://www.tptoriginals.org/projects/then-now-reflections-on-womens-suffrage/). A Buyer Behavior Market Research class project surveyed first-year seminar students who watched the *Citizen* documentary as a part of their TRW class to document how watching the film increased their likelihood to vote in the presidential elections. Their research showed that St. Catherine University students surveyed before and after watching *Citizen* were more likely to vote in the presidential elections and to show an interest in further civic engagement activities after learning about the history of the women's suffrage movement in Minnesota.

Reflections and Areas for Future Learning

These three projects have a few things in common. They all involved more than one St. Catherine University course. In fact, all three included tie-ins to a campuswide initiative that involved the entire campus community in some way. All three projects addressed some larger issue of systemic injustice that inspired people to participate and connected to the social justice mission of the university. All three projects allowed for both curricular and cocurricular involvement and for various service-learning courses to connect to the broader work in ways that fit with their course learning objectives and frameworks. These three projects show the potential cumulative impact and increased access of service-learning courses when they are strategically aligned and connected to a common campus-based social justice issue or theme, or partner organization. What could be the impact of multiyear campuswide or departmental initiatives that involve not just one or

two courses, but dozens across many disciplines? Would faculty newer to service-learning be more likely to participate if they were building on an existing body of work, relationships, and resources? Do students feel more connected and engaged in virtual settings when they know their service-learning work is a part of a broader effort and collective impact? Figure 1 illustrates the cumulative impact of multiple points of community-engaged learning working collaboratively within a shared social justice issue.

A Critical Service-Learning Framework

The literature around community engagement in higher education has increasingly reflected the influence of critical pedagogy and the need for critical approaches to service-learning and community-engaged research. These include social justice and critical consciousness competencies such as attention to power dynamics, authentic relationships, and a systems-level analysis of social problems (Daigre, 2000; Mitchell, 2008). The Center for Community Work and Learning spent the greater part of the 2019–2020 academic year leading a series of discussions and workshops that focused on critical service-learning pedagogy and approaches that some faculty had already been developing or deepening in their service-learning courses. Based on faculty and student evaluations, and on an initial analysis of the types of service-learning courses that could be maintained virtually during COVID, the service-learning courses connected to one of the three campuswide initiatives using one or more aspects of critical service-learning tenets were most successful in meeting their learning outcomes. I will reflect on the three examples above through the lens of these key elements of critical service-learning: attention to power dynamics, authentic relationships, and systems-level analysis of social problems.

Attention to Power Dynamics

With the service-learning courses participating in the Mapping Prejudice/Welcoming the Dear Neighbor? collaboration, the time spent preparing students for the context and the historical materials they would be working with was very important. It was also important to have some space

Figure 1. Cumulative Impact of Community Engagement

for students to reflect and think about their own lived experiences as they relate to racial housing discrimination and the impact of historical policies on current racial disparities. Connections to current racial disparities explored in this project included the ways in which the COVID-19 virus is impacting communities of color at a higher rate than White communities in the Twin Cities, current housing inequities and threats of further displacement of low-income Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) residents with rising housing costs and housing demand, and the lack of trust between police and BIPOC communities.

Courses that were able to integrate these discussions and reflections during virtual class sessions to support the students' engagement with the racial covenants in housing deeds and to connect how the project related to the course objectives allowed students to be open to thinking critically about their own positionality and experience with the subject matter and to explore issues of power and privilege. The CWL staff learned that, especially in a virtual format where participants cannot always see each other's faces or read body language, it is much harder for a facilitator to see how students are reacting to and processing the information. In some courses, the class reflection on the service-learning work of transcribing the racial covenants in housing deeds was limited to a single class session facilitated by a visiting CWL staff member. The potential power dynamics between a faculty member and visiting facilitator were at times exacerbated in a virtual space where many students did not have cameras turned on and where student expectations for the purpose of the class reflection had not been set by the faculty member. Also, dynamics of perceived race, class, age, and academic authority come into play when a visiting facilitator enters a virtual space to facilitate discussions. The ability for a faculty member to build trust and rapport in a classroom is diminished in a virtual setting, and this is even more pronounced for a visiting facilitator. In a few cases, students reported that they felt triggered by either the service-learning prereflection activity itself that asked them to think about their own lived experiences and worldviews, or by the ways the historical racialized terms in the housing deeds or historic maps were presented that led them to feel pained by the use of specific language used in the racial covenants.

There are many dynamics that can be unpacked and explored from these experiences. One potential learning is that community engagement staff facilitators should work closely with faculty members to prepare for such virtual classroom engagements with attention paid to the dynamics between students and teachers when discussing topics of race and racism. Another is that facilitators, especially White-appearing facilitators, cannot assume trust in a virtual classroom when discussing social justice issues, and must work with faculty members to lay the groundwork before the discussion. Facilitators also need to be intentional and transparent about their own relationship to the subject matter and take the time to develop rapport with students, even in a virtual one-time classroom. The time and intentionality that this kind of authentic engagement takes should be explored more fully as it applies to virtual classroom discussions.

Authentic Relationships

The ability of the three campus initiatives to continue and even strengthen during the COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest in the Twin Cities rested on the length and depth of the existing partnerships and relationships with community colleagues and between Community Work and Learning staff and university faculty and leadership. The established trust between individuals was essential to the transition to virtual communication and the ongoing adjustments all partners needed to make throughout the year to continue the work. Service-learning courses that had relied on more generic relationships with volunteer programs at area nonprofit organizations connected to many local universities were often not as likely to adapt well to the changing needs of students and community partners. It was also more likely that the faculty members who could most effectively anticipate what would be needed to best support students in virtual service-learning projects were those who had the time to spend in relationships with community partners and CWL staff members to prepare for the virtual service-learning projects.

Systems-Level Analysis of Social Problems

A campuswide focus on tangible projects that illuminated the systemic roots to current racial inequalities became a valuable teaching tool for many different types of

engagement and discipline-specific learning. Racial housing discrimination and segregation, the impact of COVID-19 on incarcerated individuals, and voting rights all proved to be larger umbrellas under which many service-learning courses could explore social issues within larger systemic contexts. Aligning multiple courses under three broad issues also made it easier for the Center for Community Work and Learning to develop educational materials and assignment models that faculty could readily adapt to their own courses to better support and integrate the service-learning activities. The social justice focus of these three projects also aligned well with the university's social justice and inclusive excellence efforts. It offered tangible ways to connect students to the campus-based discussions about antiracism that began before 2020, but that were made even more proximate given the injustices revealed by the pandemic and police violence, and the resulting trauma experienced by many in the campus community and student body. Two responses from summer 2020 service-learning students reflect the effectiveness of this approach:

> I'm so glad we're wrapping up our program with this service learning course! Learning about deep rooted systemic racism in our country and state will only help me be a better clinician for my future patients.

> The service learning experience has created an eye-opening experience. You see the disparities that you may have been shielded from but should not be shielded from. It has helped create a greater understanding of the community that I reside in.

Virtual Project-Based Service-Learning

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Catherine University's Center for Community Work and Learning was supporting an average of 45 courses a semester that included some form of community-engaged learning. These ranged from ongoing individual service-learning frameworks wherein students worked a set number of hours over the course of the semester with a local nonprofit organization to a series of small group experiences where students could contribute to a local organization or effort a few times over the semester to classroom projects created with a community partner to meet a specific organizational need or research question. In these project-based models, students have a concrete deliverable by the end of the semester, and they present their work or findings to an organization as a team or as a whole class. With the exception of the project-based service-learning, the majority of these activities relied heavily on students being able to work directly with people at a community site. The Center for Community Work and Learning had already been feeling the strain on St. Catherine University students to achieve a set number of individual service-learning hours outside the classroom during a community-engaged course. The pressures of school, necessary paid work, lack of reliable transportation, and family commitments made the weekly in-person service-learning increasingly difficult to achieve for many students. The use of in-class time for project-based service-learning that did not require students to be physically present individually at a local community partner site for regular hours throughout the semester grew as a way to allow more students in more service-learning courses to participate in community-engaged learning and still meet articulated needs of community partners.

In March 2020, in response to increasing COVID-19 infections in Minnesota, the Center for Community Work and Learning decided that students would no longer engage in person with community-based work and projects. The Center transitioned service-learning courses and student employment programs from in-person to virtual-only opportunities. The decreased capacity of local nonprofit organizations in the Twin Cities to work with virtual service-learning courses and students further pushed the Center to deepen existing partnerships where ongoing work on longer term projects was already under way. These projects and initiatives lent themselves well to virtual engagement with a cohort of students in a service-learning course or with research projects that were building on existing partnerships and work.

Benefits of Virtual Project-Based Service-Learning

With the growth of both online learning and service-learning, it was natural for the field to see a growing interest in virtual service-learning coursework, even before the pandemic. In the foreword to the collection *eService-Learning: Creating Experiential*

Learning and Civic Engagement Through Online and Hybrid Courses, Andy Furco writes that "eService-Learning serves as a vehicle for extending the reach and impact of students' service-learning experiences while ensuring that online learning activities are relevant, contextualized, and linked to civic responsibility" (Furco, 2015, p.ix). The truth is that without the opportunity for virtual service-learning projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Catherine University students would not have had the opportunity to connect with real-life projects and critical current issues of social justice in such direct ways. These projects expanded students' learning and their impact on community members and community-based initiatives. Further, the virtual service-learning projects offered benefits this year that were especially relevant to student engagement and morale within the online learning classroom community. Students benefited from having a common experience in the classroom where they could reflect together and talk about the very real social justice issues being exposed by the pandemic, and draw connections from the service-learning project to the larger class themes and to their own lived experiences with the issues. A summer 2020 service-learning faculty member commented, "All students had different lived experiences coming into the class and they were able to help each other see things more broadly. Coming together and having a shared experience helps them make deeper connections."

During the pandemic and social unrest, the virtual service-learning projects helped to build connection and community for some students in the classroom and gave them a sense of purpose that kept them engaged in the virtual format. Students also seemed to benefit from the connection the projects gave them to people in the broader community, such as incarcerated individuals, staff members with local nonprofit organizations, and St. Catherine University community members who connected to or learned from the projects they worked on. A fall 2020 service-learning faculty member observed, "All three of my courses have a community engagement component that I am relying on to keep students motivated and connected." And, in the words of a summer 2020 service-learning student, "Connecting with real people through the Women's Prison Book Project was the highlight of this course."

Students were more able to communicate with the community partners on a regular basis as staff members at the local nonprofits also transitioned and adapted to virtual meeting tools and were more accessible to student teams working on virtual projects with community partners. A service-learning faculty member commented, "Clients find it is easier to connect with students as all of their work is now online. They are better able to fit in the work of responding to students and can virtually meet with them more reliably."

Limitations of Virtual Service-Learning

The courses that kept a service-learning component even as they had to transition the course to an online format due to the pandemic were often taught by instructors who had worked for years to deepen the integration of the service-learning into the course objectives and class assignments. One service-learning faculty member commented, "When community-engaged learning is an extra, it is the first thing to go—but when it is the thing they are doing in the class it is always more meaningful and offers lifelong learning, growth and transformation."

Although the three examples from St. Catherine University show that a lot is possible with virtual service-learning projects given the right partnerships, curriculum integration, and faculty buy-in, we still mourn the loss of connection and cannot ignore the huge toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and limited in-person contact on our students and on our community partners. Many of our local nonprofit partners need in-person support to help them meet the immediate needs of the people they serve. The nonprofit sector in Minnesota has been hit hard by layoffs and staff turnover, and the relationships that were formed over years will have much rebuilding to do when we are able to meet with our partners and community members again in person. And despite many students in virtual service-learning courses doing great work and having positive things to say about what they learned, many responses in our fall service-learning evaluations point to students' preference for being out in the community, working with individuals and issues face to face: "I truly forgot that I am taking a service-learning class because it just feels so disconnected from the work and sense of community." "It was harder

to learn the course content and connect with the people in the community without being able to speak to them face to face." "I still believe that CEL is a good opportunity for students, but because of Covid-19, I don't feel that we made as big of an impact as we could have if we were able to directly work with the community."

Final Thoughts

The last 10 months of COVID-19 have shown me that the core attributes that draw me and many other community engagement professionals to the work, no matter what format, remain consistent. The types of service-learning that have the biggest impact on students, community partners, faculty, and campus morale focus on ways to build real connections, relationships, relevance, and a sense of civic purpose. Our experiences with virtual service-learning this year point to areas where we can work to strengthen virtual project-based service-learning for students and community partners. It is important to work ahead of the course with community partners and faculty to both plan for the integration of the projects into the core course themes and also to work within a critical service-learning framework that emphasizes power dynamics, authentic relationships, and a systems-level analysis of social problems. As we move cautiously back to in-person learning, what might we want to keep from the virtual platforms, tools, and methods of communication and engagement?

Community engagement professionals have a role to play in helping institutions of higher education achieve their goals for transformative change and deepening civic engagement (Hübler & Quan, 2017, p. 101). The examples highlighted here point to the possibilities that exist for campuswide initiatives with a social justice focus that can work to connect curricular and cocurricular efforts and courses across semesters. They demonstrate how service-learning courses can build on each other using varied disciplines drawing on shared social contexts and civic engagement objectives. They also show how broader community engagement projects that have service-learning courses as an ongoing foundation and concrete space for student engagement can activate a broader campus community interested in issues of social justice and transformation. How can our evaluation of individual student learning outcomes and semester-by-semester community impacts build strategically to connect service-learning course projects and impact over time? Can community engagement offices play a role not only in coordinating the planning and alignment across multiple courses and disciplines, but also in the long-term assessment of their cumulative impact on local community initiatives, campus-based efforts, and student learning outcomes?

Another important area for our office to research is the role of established longer term collective campuswide efforts with a shared social justice focus in bringing faculty newer to aspects of critical service-learning into this kind of community engagement. As we work to formalize and institutionalize an engaged faculty development program, can collective community projects be the on ramp for faculty members new to critical service-learning frameworks? We hope to build on this collective and interdisciplinary work within a social justice framework to engage faculty members from different departments and schools together to reflect on their learning, thus fostering the kind of critical reflection as a campus community that we encourage in our students.

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Community-Based Participatory Research During the COVID-19 Crisis: Lessons for Partnership Resiliency

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Abstract

This reflective essay explores how the strengths and even presumed limitations of community-based participatory and action research are critical assets to building and sustaining resilient research partnerships before, during, and after particularly difficult times. After highlighting key concepts from the boundary-spanning and resiliency literatures, we outline how four deep-seated principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) contribute to building partnership and community resiliency. We draw upon our decades of experience across a wide range of both rural and urban partnerships to share examples of how these concepts were applied in actual research situations during the COVID-19 pandemic to understand how they sustain and strengthen partnerships and community impact.

Keywords: community-based participatory research, action research, boundary spanning, partnership resilience, COVID-19

As academic institutions work to strengthen their community impact and meet society's needs as knowledge-creating organizations, research partnerships have become a central tool for achieving these goals. Going by various names such as community participatory and action research, these community-engaged approaches to knowledge generation have directly confronted the long-standing problem of universities doing research in isolation from what partners might need, want, or can even use (Boyer, 1990; Chaffee, 1998; Hart & Silka, 2020; Sandmann, 1996; Lubchenco, 2017; Newman et al., 2004).

Today, this collaborative approach to co-create knowledge is gaining further recognition and acceptance at exactly the time when physical and social isolation is a central response to the ubiquitous COVID-19 health crisis. An orientation that involves working closely together might seem especially vulnerable to the limitations imposed by COVID-19. Could these kinds of constraints have the potential to undermine the very core of this approach? Some researchers are reverting to less collaborative approaches or putting research on hold as institutions around the country, including our own, have issued moratoriums on in-person community-engaged work, closed campuses, and moved meetings and classes online at different points throughout the pandemic. Examples include announcements indicating that "students who are engaged in community work will not be continuing in-person community placements" and policies that universities conduct and continue "remote operations for employees—and continue to cancel or postpone any on-campus events" (samples of institutional communications from University of Massachusetts Lowell and Tufts University during spring 2020).

As university partners, we emphasize how important it is that higher education rethink community–university approaches to knowledge creation under these kinds of constraints. We consider that while a crisis

like the COVID-19 pandemic may require changes, community participatory and action research (e.g., CBPR, PAR) feature resilience and boundary-spanning attributes that make these approaches well-suited and particularly useful when responding to and withstanding shocks to the system (Valdez & Gubrium, 2020). We examine these ideas in light of boundary-spanning and resiliency literatures, then draw on lessons from both urban and rural research settings that are faced with the pandemic, to better understand these ideas in practice.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) and participatory action research (PAR) are collaborative approaches in which universities and partners cocreate knowledge (Israel, Eng, et al., 2005; McIntyre, 2008). These draw from decades of increased understanding that through active and equitable collaboration, those closest to or most impacted by a social problem are essential thought leaders on research that informs potential solutions (Israel, Schulz, et al., 1998; Lewin, 1946; Plummer et al., 2017; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). The exact forms of participatory and action approaches can vary, but all involve partners and researchers working together on some or all of the steps in research (Clark et al., 2003; Hutchins et al., 2013; Israel, Schulz, et al., 1998; Mercer et al., 2008; Shirk et al., 2012; Silka & Renault-Caragianes, 2006), including sharing decisions on what to study, how it should be studied, and how the findings should be shared and implemented. For this article, we recognize that community-engaged research exists as a continuum, as well as divergent streams of CBPR and PAR, but we generally use the term *CBPR* as shorthand for all of these approaches, understanding that significant conceptual overlap ties various participatory and action research approaches together.

CBPR prioritizes many attributes that are useful during crises, such as flexibility, building trust, combining knowledge, and long-term relationships. In this article we outline and illustrate key CBPR principles as they could and do relate to conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) multiple sources of knowledge and bidirectional capacity building to understand problems and find new solutions (Collins et al., 2018; Greenbaum et al., 2019; Hacker, 2013; Israel, Eng, et al., 2013), (2) a grounding in equitable partnerships that inform targeted social action (Bieluch et al., 2016; Geigis et al., 2007; van de Sande & Schwartz, 2017), (3) community relevance of research questions and findings (Hart & Silka, 2020; Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008), and (4) flexibility embedded throughout partnership development and across research phases (Bieluch et al., 2016; D'Alonzo, 2010; Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008). These principles apply across different contexts, both urban and rural, and especially during times of extreme stress and crisis.

In addition to combining applied, theoretical, and other kinds of knowledge, CBPR also supports interdisciplinary work (Holland et al., 2010). Although frequently seen in public and community health research (Israel, Eng, et al., 2005), CBPR approaches are useful across academic disciplines, including environmental, humanities, engineering, and social and "hard" sciences. Wherever research focuses on a community-centered question, whether the community is geographical, cultural, or defined by other characteristics, a CBPR approach integrates academic and local knowledge perspectives (Andersson, 2018; Hacker, 2013) to better understand the problem itself. Community participatory and action research broadens the range of available knowledge and methods to identify and tackle community problems in new ways (Jason et al., 2004; McIntyre, 2008).

How might this work? Consider an illustrative example in Maine described by Ranco et al. (2012). The emerald ash borer, an invasive pest, is migrating into this rural state and has the potential to dramatically reduce populations of ash trees. Entomological and forestry researchers in Maine were not studying this invasive species that decimates brown ash; ash trees were not a primary concern to researchers. It turns out, however, that the brown ash was the most important tree species for indigenous Indian basket makers, a major group maintaining Wabanaki culture. Researchers did not know this, did not know the conditions under which the brown ash prospered, and knew little about the ecology of these trees. The researchers were familiar, however, with how to study invasive pests. Codeveloped research bringing together indigenous knowledge and Western science was undertaken, with results that met community needs and moved science forward. In addition, the partnership resulted in University of Maine (UMaine) forestry students adding CBPR research approaches to their research

"tool kits" (Ranco et al., 2012).

Today, community and university partners must navigate such research collaborations even as overlapping crises compound barriers to full economic and civic participation. The COVID-19 pandemic makes the value of CBPR approaches clear and necessary. The inherent resiliency-building opportunities of CBPR in concert with its boundary-spanning function provide important lessons that prepare us for the next crisis by building critical infrastructure and skills today. These attributes enable researchers to operate effectively and build value during a crisis, fortifying research under stressful conditions. Furthermore, informed by the boundary-spanning literature so that we understand how to leverage these attributes, participatory and action research help us construct seismic-resistant research partnerships *before* a metaphorical earthquake, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, strikes.

Let's first take a look at boundary spanning and resiliency to understand how engaged research partnerships can identify and leverage these features. With these in mind, we can then explore four key principles of CBPR, using concrete examples and in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

What Is Meant by Boundary Spanning?

For 50 years, researchers have explored the concept and practice of *boundary spanning* to understand how crisscrossing organizational and community borders can facilitate innovation and growth. Although boundaries help define organizations, active boundary spanning prevents partnerships "from becoming ossified and disconnected from changes in environment" (Aldrich & Herker, 1977, p. 219). Boundary spanning enables better adaptation to changing contexts (Goldring, 1996) by accessing external information and acting as bridges to facilitate knowledge exchange (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) and enabling innovation through this exchange (Tushman, 1977). This occurs across all kinds of organizations, including community groups, universities, nonprofits, and government agencies. Cash et al. (2006) noted that spanners can transfer vital scientific information to communities in a manner that is socially embedded and therefore more salient, credible, legitimate, and useful. They described the alternative as the "loading dock" approach to linking research to its users. This is the notion that when research is conducted, it is then placed on the metaphorical loading dock ready to be picked up and distributed like the latest tech gadget. However, the latest gadget being manufactured likely went through some rigorous market testing to be sure it would sell. Without a similar process to determine whether what is being researched is actually useful to the end stakeholders, the research might just pile up and never be used. In community–university partnerships, the role of boundary spanning intertwines the research into applicable uses and makes it more easily accessible.

These partnerships provide not only a wider range of available resources, but also new channels for knowledge distribution. Information about rapidly changing environmental conditions can aid in resiliency development by helping partners adapt more quickly, and because boundary spanners can bring together untraditional collaborators (Miller, 2008), the pool of resources and capital (human, financial, social) available to community–university partnerships deepens. The information that boundary spanners collect and distribute is important at all points of the innovation process (Tushman, 1977), applicable to research stages from early idea formation to problem solving to implementation and evaluation.

Academic institutions, seeing the value of these relationships across organizations and communities, are in some cases intentionally incorporating community–university boundary spanning. For example, Maine is a state of major rivers, many of which were dammed decades ago when the ecological impacts were not fully understood (Lichter & Ames, 2012). Outcomes included a great reduction in fish that supplied the food chain for other species, whose numbers precipitously dropped. The rivers serve many groups who have competing goals, and research from many different disciplines is needed to understand the problems and proposed viable solutions. Boundary spanners are crucial to many research contexts such as these. Subsequently, University of Maine students are deliberately being taught boundary spanner skills: how to bring together the information from diverse groups and disciplines, and how to coalesce the information to create decision-support tools that assist communities using diverse

data from multiple perspectives and disciplines (Meyer et al., 2016).

Additionally, successful boundary-spanning leadership enables more effective and efficient collaboration over shared goals (Miller, 2008) that is especially important during times of crisis to bring together very different expertise and experience for complex problems. We often assume this must be a face-to-face activity (i.e., facilitating discussions and shared decision making), but it actually does not require in-person contact. A recent Partnerships for Environmental Public Health online panel discussion (Havlicek et al., 2020) highlighted this point when researchers who facilitated a rural Michigan-based community forum, which had been occurring annually for decades, started drawing unanticipated numbers of new participants. Rather than preventing participation, moving the community meeting online had made it *more* accessible for many.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the value of the boundary-spanning capacity of participatory and action research, which can advance resiliency during a crisis and promote recovery. The relationships and cultural capital that boundary spanners develop over time enable them to share information quickly and efficiently in an emergency. Likewise, the ability to understand a crisis outside one's community or academic silo can facilitate the design of more effective preventive measures to avoid or mitigate future crisis situations. All of these possibilities are wrapped up in the concept of resiliency, which will be discussed next.

What Is Meant by Resiliency?

Resiliency refers to the capacity to adapt and thrive through change, setbacks, distress, or trauma (Bonanno, 2004; Magis, 2010), whether in personal or community contexts. The resiliency literature within psychology and biophysical sciences (Adger, 2000; Allen, 2006; Berkes & Folke, 1998; Chapman et al., 2018; Folke et al., 2003; Young, 2010) highlights the importance of pretrauma or predisaster factors—such as strengths and resources that can be drawn on during crisis—for subsequent recovery and adaptation. The presence of different factors can help or hinder individual and community responses.

Resiliency in action can mean all kinds of things. For instance, it might mean reconsidering how community members, businesses, scientists, municipal agencies, and others can improve multidirectional communications in the face of unanticipated disasters. Or it could involve a combination of targeted investment, neighborhood agriculture, and home-grown social networks in areas with ongoing food insecurity. Another community might identify changes in their local environment and explore ways to make coastlines greener and more permeable, and thus more resilient to rising water levels during storms. In yet another community, building resiliency can mean developing crisis plans such as standard operating procedures for conducting outreach to vulnerable communities safely so that disruptions to necessary services do not occur. Zoning, education, and financial policies, for example, might all contribute to community resiliency across a wide range of threats and challenges, including natural disaster, economic stagnation, chronic social problems, and public health crises.

An example from Maine's coastal communities illustrates how resiliency, bolstered through the boundary-spanning work of community–university research partnerships, enables a wide range of stakeholders to sustain the fragile clamming industry. Clam flats are changing along the seaboard, requiring diverse groups to work together. An invasive species of green crab is disrupting the clam flats, while changes in seaside community development lead to unpredictable sewage outflows that restrict clamming opportunities as well as raise dangerous health issues. Many unaligned levels of government (town, state, and federal) have jurisdiction over different aspects of the clam flats, resulting in uncoordinated activities. UMaine researcher Bridie McGreavy, through her "working the tides" efforts (McGreavy et al., 2018), has made serving as a boundary spanner a central way to bring groups together to solve problems and build the economic resiliency of Maine's clamming communities using tools such as CBPR. With her partners and her students, McGreavy has facilitated knowledge sharing between clammers, policymakers, and scientists, for example, about contamination and strategies for assessing contamination-related risks to economic opportunities (current efforts are described at https://themudflat.org/). McGreavy's students are learning boundary spanning as a central part of research–action approaches and learning what can be achieved by working

together despite the instability in contexts and problems.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, resilient communities and individuals prepared for disaster have a leg up in withstanding the first phase of bewildering change, as well as whatever follows. Communities and individuals that have trained their resiliency muscles can more readily lift themselves out of disaster and find stable ground.

How Do Aspects of CBPR Contribute to Building Partnership, Community, and Research Resiliency?

We can similarly identify CBPR features that foster resiliency and leverage the benefits of boundary spanning in research partnerships. Drawing from the literature and our own experiences in both rural and urban settings during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we outline four community participatory and action principles that illustrate critical resiliency-building and boundary-spanning roles during crisis: Equitable partnerships, multiple sources of knowledge, community relevance of findings, and flexibility all enhance CBPR effectiveness and make this approach uniquely positioned to address pandemic-related challenges. We explore these elements of CBPR, illustrate each in practice through research examples, offer questions for community-engaged researchers to consider, and conclude with ideas for further consideration and exploration.

Principle 1: Equitable Partnerships Form the Basis for Participatory Research

CBPR diverges from traditional research approaches due to the primacy of deeply collaborative and equitable partner relationships across the research process. CBPR acknowledges community as a unit of identity (Hacker, 2013; Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008) and values coleadership research models. These partnerships upend the typical paradigm where a university researcher leads a process that culminates in an academic paper. Instead, as much as possible, CBPR aims for equal ownership of the research process, including development of key questions to be explored.

CBPR relies on developing a power-sharing structure for joint decision-making (van de Sande & Schwartz, 2017). Traditional research models are inherently unequal (Muhammad et al., 2015), with greater resources typically accumulated among university and institutional partners. CBPR relationships are intentionally constructed to be nonexploitive, and partners work to mitigate this inequality through greater transparency, communication, shared decision making, resource distribution, and relevant research findings (Hacker, 2013; Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008), so that all partners experience benefits from participation.

Participatory and action research relationships depend on trust and shared respect (Collins et al., 2018; Hacker, 2013; Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008), which facilitate connections between community, academia, government, and other actors. Because boundary spanners are bridge builders, they make these kinds of relationships across organizations and groups possible. Community–university researchers fill an important role, creating familiarity and honing a sensitivity to partners that forms the foundation of mutual trust and mutual respect. Mutual trust increases credibility among partners and enables them to work together despite vulnerabilities, and to share information and resources that would otherwise be inaccessible.

An example unfolded in a Massachusetts city that has been grappling with an opioid crisis with continuing increases in opioid-related illnesses and fatalities (Mayor's Opioid Task Force Data Subcommittee, 2020). The city created a multidisciplinary team of constituents from the Police, Fire, and Health Departments, emergency medical services, and a treatment agency, to outreach to overdose survivors and those most vulnerable to potential overdose, such as individuals with substance use disorder living in homeless encampments. Although the power dynamics among these members typically would not be balanced, team members rely heavily on one another for key components and expertise. Whether conducting daily check-ins, referrals to community meal centers, or rides to detox facilities, each team member brings not only their individual skills, motivations, and personality, but also their organizational culture to the job. Conflict sometimes arises on topics such as whether to distribute harm reduction materials, use of team equipment, or how the team is supervised. Recognizing that communicating challenges takes time and can disrupt the critical work

in which they are engaged, the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Lowell partners act as boundary spanners to hear and help guarantee equitable voice to the larger team's very diverse experiences in a way that facilitates problem-solving on multiple levels. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic when the governor shut down the state except for essential workers and businesses, the team members conducting outreach faced an almost complete stop of their work. The group discovered quickly that these colleagues and their important work seemed not to be valued nor designated as essential, despite the important service to people they had gotten to know and care about. The entire team wanted the university partners to convey data to their supervisors, including losing track of clients and disrupted paths to recovery. By sharing information across groups, the larger team could both better understand their collective value and determine ways to continue their work uninterrupted if another shutdown of that magnitude occurs.

These evolving relationships buoy both partnerships and community resiliency through magnifying the knowledge located within the community, which has the best "up close" understanding of the issue to inform preparation, interventions, and recovery. To quote Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, "Those closest to the pain should be closest to the power." In terms of CBPR, this means that community members and on-the-ground organizations leverage a deep understanding of the people, history, struggles, and triumphs of the community to inform both a more beneficial research agenda and a pathway to greater resiliency.

Finally, truly equitable partnerships are not instantaneous or easy. Effective boundary-spanning relationships through CBPR require long time horizons to establish and ongoing attention to maintain. These are time-intensive endeavors but have greater sustainability than more transactional relationships. And as with any relationship, partners learn continuously, make mistakes, and grow in their mutual understanding. This continuous improvement cycle contributes to the ongoing regeneration of preparation and resiliency.

For example, UMass Lowell's long-term relationships with the opioid outreach team's organizations provided access to honest data that was at times difficult for participants to express. The team and program participants trusted the university partners' skills in protecting identities and framing difficult conversations in a way that would make their voices heard. The entire team also felt comfortable being critical about data collection and other processes. It was important that all partners not only help identify appropriate data fields and methodology, but also continue to improve the process so that it ultimately documented the work accurately.

These equitable and trusting partnerships are essential (Soleri et al., 2016) and have grown more so during the COVID-19 and economic shutdowns. This project and others have relied on existing foundational partnerships with established mutual trust, enabling partners to move quickly and emergency work to be prioritized as needed. For example, none of the university researchers live in the city where another project was occurring; they were safely working from home. It was almost easy to forget that a few miles away, the city was called to action at a high level. Realizing that a data collection plan is far from the minds of people passing out boxes of food or finding safe emergency housing, the researchers needed to be aware of what they could and could not do. The university team's existing long-term relationship with the lead agency helped partners process and share what they and the people they serve were doing at the start of the pandemic. Many employers (including city departments, schools, and human service agencies) required people to work from home, a new and often unsettling experience for many. The lead agency program director called upon the university research partners, for example, to facilitate the first Zoom meeting of all the youth-serving organizations in the city. It was a new skill for the youth-serving agencies; however, the university not only already had the technology but had already been using these skills to teach online.

Principle 2: Multiple Sources of Knowledge, Skills, and Resources Are Essential

The collaborative partnerships highlighted above provide CBPR with a wide pool of knowledge, skills, and resources through their boundary-spanning roles across groups and organizations. Community partners, for instance, bring different and indispensable skills and information than do academic partners, including the neces-

sary understanding of community realities to recognize key questions to ask, issues to probe, and potential interventions and solutions to design (Hacker, 2013; Minkler, 2005). The skills of collaborators can complement each other and build on the strengths and resources of the community. For example, some partners may have language fluency, understand local history, possess a cultural understanding and relationships in individual immigrant communities (Hacker, 2013), have networks in specialized industry or in political offices, or be able to access resources that can translate findings into localized action.

The importance of not assuming that researchers have all of the needed knowledge to "help" community partners is especially brought home when the differences between partners are great (Silka, 2001), as many earlier CBPR projects illustrate. For example, throughout the 1980s and 1990s new immigrants and refugees moved into eastern Massachusetts cities like Lowell and Lawrence, an early industrialized region with chemical contamination such as lead remaining in houses, buildings, yards, and water sources. A group concerned with pediatric lead exposure decided to donate mattress covers to immigrant families for children's beds. The group went to great effort to do this and the refugee community appreciated the effort, but gently pointed out that their children did not sleep on mattresses and so the covers would not be helpful. Subsequent partnerships built around sharing knowledge and developing appropriate research and interventions have become central to changing this dynamic. Partnerships become critically important where the gaps and differences in knowledge are greatest between the community and the university. The critical gaps can include researchers not understanding the tools, levers, and decision-making processes that influence how research will be used and what research will be helpful (Silka, 2002).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, new examples of this same issue continued to emerge. For instance, some university researchers assumed that a lack of internet access in Boston area neighborhoods posed an insurmountable challenge for remote education, when a bigger problem for some neighborhoods has been finding adequately supervised space for schoolwork. Other local knowledge, available through CBPR-type boundary-spanning partnerships, must be amalgamated for effective and relevant research, so researchers can be aware of disruptions to public transportation or grasp the ever-shifting priorities of Greater Boston's community organizations regarding emergency housing and food insecurity. Research on other issues can continue only if the existing partnership can move and respond as needed. In another example related to technology and building on community knowledge and resources during the pandemic, researchers interviewing people with opioid use disorder who are homeless had intended to visit local encampments. They were faced with COVID-related in-person research restrictions, but the data was still needed for immediate improvements to services for this vulnerable population. Through the research partnership, which spanned relationships with other city organizations, the university partners connected with a local church that hosted telemedical appointments for residents with limited access to technology. The community–university partnership researchers were able to combine these church-hosted telemedical services with additional data collection and outreach.

These deep partnerships also facilitate non-research supports during a crisis. For example, during the first month of the COVID pandemic shutdown in the Boston area, members of the Tisch College Community Research Center steering committee met online, including local community organization leaders who have been working with Tufts University for years, to reconnect and communicate across community–university boundaries. Community partners shared news of disrupted programs, immediate needs related to resident unemployment and illness, and concerns regarding lost revenue. University partners in turn reported disrupted coursework, immediate student and staff health worries, and potential financial uncertainties. Although the discussion did not focus on research per se, the discussion itself was only possible because of the community and university partners' previous engagement in participatory and action research undertakings. With existing relationships, during a crisis partners can learn from each other and consider how to combine resources and make connections.

Further, not only does CBPR connect a wide range of community partners, but by drawing from a multidisciplinary back-

ground, partners pull knowledge from a wide range of academic literatures, including theories, examples, and new ways of looking at a problem. In academia, it is sometimes assumed that CBPR only serves problems addressed by the social sciences. Other concerns relate to capacity to generalize findings (Hacker, 2013) or potential conflicts of interest between scientists and community partners (Resnik & Kennedy, 2010). Consequently, some research projects are viewed as inappropriate candidates for involving partners and employing CBPR even though the opportunity for interdisciplinary work to enrich this research is clear (Holland et al., 2010).

Consider the example of waste management. Throughout the country and worldwide, COVID has exacerbated waste production problems (Kulkarni & Anantharama, 2020). At UMaine, faculty performing waste-related research from their own disciplinary silos and perspectives (engineering, food systems, economics, psychology, anthropology, chemistry, health, and nursing) have come together with partners to address the multifaceted problem of waste, especially during the pandemic. This problem has so many components that the only way to address it has been by working across disciplines and with partners as varied as policymakers, users of recycled materials, farmers who use compost, and administrators of facilities such as hospitals that create enormous amounts of contaminated waste (Isenhour et al., 2016; Saber & Silka, 2020). Equitable partnerships and boundary spanning have been essential and have led to new legislation and research-based changes in practice.

Aligned with multiple sources of knowledge, CBPR facilitates bidirectional learning among all partners that enables ongoing innovation (Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008). Knowledge exchange is a basic function of boundary spanners acting as bridges across organizations and between systems. The practice of mutual discovery also incorporates an iterative process for ongoing learning and revision, especially when embedded with intentional opportunities for reflection. These actions support organizational and community resilience by supplying novel information that can inform both proactive and recovery practices. This includes distribution of results and lessons in ways that are relevant for all partners. During crises, these kinds of immediate information exchange can prove critical, especially in unstable and rapidly unfolding crisis circumstances (Valdez & Gubrium, 2020).

Principle 3: Research Must Be Relevant to the Community

Community participatory and action research is social justice oriented in nature and is meaningful to community needs (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013; Devia et al., 2017). With a community-driven focus, these research partnerships can be engaged in both theoretical and applied work simultaneously, addressing community-identified problems. Often, CBPR uses ecological perspectives that can take into account a wide range of factors that impact a community, such as social determinants of health (Israel, Schulz, et al., 2008). Boundary spanners provide a practical service in this regard and can help tailor research to the needs of stakeholders. Local relevance is further bolstered by connecting previously unaffiliated groups and linking their expertise in new ways.

The relevance of the research focus is of consequence for greater community resiliency. For example, CBPR can deliberately build on existing community or individual assets to aid resilience development. Crisis preparation and recovery must be grounded in local contexts and be locally meaningful. In order for findings to be effective, they must not be limited to high level and detached insight, but should instead bring together a broad coalition of perspectives to inform local action. This is especially critical during an emergency like the COVID public health crisis where knowledge must be shared and applied without delay.

An illustration of local relevance points us to a small Massachusetts city that received multiyear federal funds to help transform a high-crime, depressed downtown district into a vibrant hub of cultural, culinary, and family-friendly activity. UMass Lowell and community partner researchers collaborated throughout the planning process, getting to know the key players and building relationships while assisting the stakeholders with developing a strong plan to measure the impacts of the project. With detailed plans in hand and a scatter of partners poised to take them into action, the pandemic barreled in. A city filled with essential workers—relying on public transportation and initially scant information in multiple languages—created a perfect storm resulting in

a persistently high citywide virus rate. Some partners faced a complete stoppage of the project as planned and instead were forced to attend to basic needs such as distributing food and cleaning supplies, securing safe emergency housing, and creating and disseminating health and safety information in Spanish. Community and university partners recognized that the work being performed in the city was monumental and perhaps a model for future crises for other cities. Research partners collected data on the challenges and how they were met, what new partners were engaged, and how they sought to do the same or act differently in a second wave outbreak. Because of the trust the community and university stakeholders had developed in person at the table over the long planning process, coupled with the deep relevance of the partnership and its research to the community, the partners felt at ease navigating this change. They also recognized the importance of documenting this process with additional interviews to provide another view of the elements of a resilient city.

Principle 4: Flexibility Is Key

Flexibility is a theme that runs throughout the literature on participatory and action research. The previous three principles touch on flexibility and the examples illustrate it, yet this concept is so critical that we demarcate it as its own section here. Flexibility enables community-engaged research to respond to emerging needs, to incorporate new partners, and to "keep a finger on the pulse" of what is most important. Resilient partnerships and resilient communities require flexibility and the ability to "swerve" as circumstances change with the capacity to bend rather than break. The ability to quickly assess and shift gears is also a critical function of emergency operations during crises. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, all partners have found themselves overloaded with emergency issues that could not be delayed. Both nonprofit programs and university classes were canceled or moved online. Both community organizations and universities were constrained financially, and many stakeholders, including staff and students, were suddenly physically absent from these communities.

As a result, partners have relied on creative flexibility to continue their work. For example, UMass Lowell faculty and their Peruvian community and medical partners were engaged in a long-term CBPR project aimed at strengthening tuberculosis treatment in low-income communities struggling with limited health resources (Brunette & Curioso, 2017). The Peruvian–UMass partnership focuses on understanding community needs, goals, and resources, and working to codevelop new forms of TB testing that could be used in the community and could help serve the community's goals of rapidly identifying TB cases. In the midst of this partnership, COVID-19 emerged and immediately constrained the possibility of highly important face-to-face contact between these international partners. Despite this obstacle, they continued to build on past experiences to codesign ways that computer models could be made to work in the local contexts. In essence, they were able to pivot while still maintaining their original goals.

What can we learn from the four principles of CBPR that enable research to progress, and even flourish, during a crisis like the pandemic? As the examples in this section suggest, CBPR's underlying orientation along these concepts illustrates sample pathways in which research can move forward even when preplanned steps cannot be exactly followed. These basic underpinnings of participatory and action research can help us consider how to reinforce equitable partnerships, combined knowledge sources, local relevance, and flexibility in different research scenarios. This can help strengthen and prepare both research and partnerships for external shocks. In the conclusion, we reflect and consider what this means for continuing to strengthen CBPR approaches.

Conclusion

As noted throughout this essay, CBPR and related approaches help universities move beyond self-contained classrooms and laboratories and into the arena of working with community partners to attend to immediate problems. Through participatory and action research, knowledge discovery is linked to problem solving and, on many campuses, students, community partners, and faculty members participate in research training that does not separate research from the community context in which the problem analysis is generated and the findings will be applied (Bieluch et al., 2019). Potential users are deeply involved in the design of the research to ensure that its usefulness is maximized. To succeed at this complex

form of research, boundary spanning is key to increase the rigor and quality of research, to adapt to pressing needs, and to build a more resilient partnership and community. As things change in this complex CBPR network of people and activities, resilient research partnerships mean that despite pivots and adaptations, goals can be maintained and achieved without harming the partnership. And with each CBPR principle outlined here, there are strategic questions—on issues of equity, multiple sources of knowledge, relevance, and flexibility—that we can consider in collaboration with our research partners. These can help us be more intentional about constructing more crisis-resilient partnerships and communities: How can our boundary-spanning collaborations advance equity in terms of decision making, resources, and impact during a crisis, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic? Who else could or should be at the table, what knowledge or perspective might be missing, and how can research be sensitive and responsive to changing community concerns during a crisis? How do we create and maintain a collaborative research environment? How and why are our particular research questions being asked and to whom? How can we pivot and bend effectively—such as during COVID-19—while still remaining true to our community-centered research goals?

The examples here have been intended to show these principles in the diversity of topics across rural and urban contexts, as well as in a wide range of disciplines involved in CBPR during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past, we frequently heard researchers say this approach is all well and good, but "my research area can't be carried out in this way." Community participatory and action research approaches, however, have demonstrated that many problems could be examined this way, and could benefit from CBPR qualities. This has been particularly true for complex and multifaceted social issues in our communities, sometimes labeled "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973). These challenges defy a monodisciplinary or unilateral approach, and instead draw on an array of invested stakeholders—including prioritizing knowledge located within a community—and methodologies to bring diversity of perspectives, information, and ideas to move the needle on potential solutions (Waring, 2012).

Now, as we have seen during the pandemic, concerns emerge that the constraints of social distancing, shifting priorities, and related challenges may weaken our ability to perform CBPR. Instead, we show evidence that these arguments do not fully account for what community-based research can do. Because of CBPR's attributes, this approach provides a useful framework for community research during this crisis.

In addition to drawing on CBPR's strengths, CBPR's suspected or hypothetical limitations may act as advantages during a crisis. For example, some criticisms of CBPR are directed toward a perceived lack of standardization that can hinder cross comparisons and generalizability (Hacker, 2013; Israel, Eng, et al., 2013; Wallenstein & Duran, 2010). This criticism stems from CBPR's emphasis on the unique quality of each community and each partnership. Nevertheless, robust methodologies enable findings to be shared and applied to new contexts and help highlight how lessons can be relevant across multiple settings. CBPR's attention to the contours of each individual partnership make this orientation particularly insightful when research partners must pivot creatively under changing circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. A second criticism leveled at CBPR, particularly for partners with limited resources, focuses on the time-intensive nature of the research relationships (Hacker, 2013; Israel, Krieger, et al., 2006). These are long-term endeavors, not transactional arrangements. Although this aspect of CBPR can be problematic—for instance, when untenured faculty are applying for promotion (Sandmann et al., 2016) or funding is time constrained—the methodology surfaces as a real asset during events such as COVID, where enduring relationships help research to continue and to grow and to shift under changing circumstances. Finally, the flexibility of CBPR, which we described as an attribute, is sometimes reproached as a flaw that in some way makes CBPR less rigorous. However, blind, rigid adherence to methodological design is arguably not itself a virtue, and a certain amount of elasticity that enables a robust research project to weather external shocks is of critical importance in most circumstances, and certainly during a pandemic.

These issues play out across all kinds of contexts, as our examples demonstrate. Urban, suburban, and rural communities

have all been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent crises in various ways. Every single community is touched, and subsequently, so is the research embedded in these communities. We advocate that qualities of community-based participatory and action approaches are instrumental for a wider range of community-engaged research because of the resiliency they promote for both the community at the center of the work and for the research partnerships themselves.

So how might CBPR-related assets support and be nurtured across community–university research partnerships? Further, how might CBPR-related work be sustained over time and across multiple partnerships and research agendas without seemingly restarting from scratch when plans are disrupted by external events? Our examples have been suggestive in this respect, but new steps are being taken to ensure the persistence of this approach and grow new "generations" of research partners in both community and university spaces. For example, the National Science Foundation is funding NSF Research Traineeship (NRT) and Smart and Connected Communities (S&CC) grants designed to bring academic disciplines together to work with community partners on research and train graduate students from multiple disciplines to develop these skills. Community-engaged researchers are being called upon more and more to assist other researchers in creating successful community partnerships where the broader impacts of their research can be realized through collaboration. UMaine has three such multiyear grants focusing on natural resources, health across different species, and climate change in Northern and Arctic areas. One project is engaging graduate students in facilitating research efforts focused on building climate change preparation capacity in Maine communities that rely on natural resources for tourism. Utilizing local climate data, students will work with the community on forecasting potential conditions that will require action. This and other programs are dramatically changing the ways students are learning research: across disciplines, with partners, and aiming to create usable knowledge. Learning across projects has involved looking for similarities and differences and providing ways to compare and contrast. Leaders in these programs at UMaine have published on the use of spidergrams to compare, contrast, and learn across diverse contexts and problems (see Jansujwicz et al., 2021).

Similarly, Tufts University is working to strengthen community participatory research and support the "next generation" of community-engaged research, including through a Tisch College research center dedicated to supporting CBPR-related approaches, interdisciplinary faculty fellowship cohorts, community–faculty copartner seed grants, and a growing network of student–community research opportunities. UMass Lowell likewise hosts interdisciplinary communities of practice for faculty researchers in community-engaged scholarship as well as a community research center focused on supporting this work throughout the university. NSF's S&CC and other programs have inspired the College of Engineering faculty and students to actively engage social scientists and community groups in identifying critical research questions that connect new technology (e.g., water quality sensors, road hazard detectors) to solving real problems of interest to community stakeholders. Local residents are involved throughout the research cycle.

The COVID-19 pandemic outwardly appears as an example of external circumstances that might undercut effective community participatory and action research. Conversely, however, the COVID context highlights how drawing on principles of CBPR and related approaches can enable research to withstand external shocks more effectively. Many universities and community stakeholders are investing in ways to expand this work among faculty, community partners, and students, such as through grantmaking, fellowships, trainings, and symposiums. Our reflections here suggest how and why CBPR-related approaches can continue to make research partnerships and communities more resilient during crises and enable universities to better meet the needs of society.

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Parent First, Essential Worker Second, Student Third: Lessons Learned From an Underrepresented Student's Journey in a Service-Learning Course During COVID-19

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Abstract

In this reflective essay, I share lessons learned when COVID-19 necessitated immediate changes to service-learning during the spring 2020 semester. The pandemic created an environment that heightened awareness about meeting underrepresented students' needs and the benefits of solidarity and reciprocity when collaborating with community partners. As the pandemic unfolded, my focus shifted from honoring commitments to community partners and course learning objectives to recognizing that the complex realities of students' lives made being responsive to their needs paramount. One nontraditional student serves as a case study; her story underscores the deep ways the pandemic affected a student's personal and professional life. I close the article with four generalizable lessons learned that faculty can employ in support of students' success in service-learning: exercising solidarity, reciprocity, and flexibility; providing guidance in project selection; serving as model learner; and embedding support for parenting and caregiving students.

Keywords: underrepresented students, student success, service-learning, community partnership, COVID-19

The purpose of this reflective essay is to share lessons learned from what went right—and what did not—when COVID-19 necessitated immediate changes to service-learning projects and learning outcomes during the spring 2020 semester. Although all of my students were impacted by the global pandemic, one student in particular, Dawna, had experiences as a parent and essential worker that illustrate how COVID-19 exacerbated existing inequities. I present Dawna's story as a case study. The interconnected aspects of Dawna's personal and professional responsibilities highlight why it is imperative that educators committed to promoting social justice through community-based service-learning provide flexible options that support *all* students' participation. A relationship with our community partner that was grounded in notions of solidarity (Clifford, 2017) and reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012; Kimmerer, 2013, 2015) proved to be an essential resource that contributed to student success and well-being when COVID-19 forced rapid changes upon higher education. Dawna's journey navigating the challenges as a parent, essential worker, and student provides insights about opportunities to strengthen approaches to supporting students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Voice and Positionality

The essay is written in my voice—Sara, the first author. Dawna is the second author. The third author, Margaret, is a colleague whose critical insights about service-learning and social justice pushed Dawna and me to deeper levels of understanding about the implications of her journey. Margaret was not involved in the class and did not know Dawna prior to working on this case study; her distance allowed her to play the role of

debriefer as well. Debriefing is a credibility strategy from qualitative research (Bassey, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although this case study is not the result of a qualitative inquiry, an external observer nonetheless proved relevant in that Margaret could ask critical questions that Dawna and I, so close to the experience, might overlook.

The choice to present the essay in my voice was based on two factors: First, the first-person voice promotes readability. Second, Dawna's multifaceted roles as a parent, essential worker, and student left her limited time for writing this article. She contributed to, commented on, refined, clarified, and approved all aspects of her case study, but she was unable to devote the time required for presenting extensive narrative in her voice. My approach to our collaboration was influenced by Cooney and Kleinsasser's (1997) insights about the necessity of establishing and *reestablishing* informed consent in qualitative research. Although Dawna is my coauthor and collaborator and not a research subject, I viewed my ethical obligations to her as being the same as if she were. In the spirit of being transparent about our methods (Smagorinsky, 2008), I offer the following as an example of how Dawna and I reaffirmed her consent in our collaboration.

The peer review feedback on an earlier version of this case study asked for more details about Dawna. I proceeded to share the reviewer's comment, and asked her, "Tell me your thoughts here, Dawna: What more would you like to share?" She responded:

> I feel comfortable enough in my situation and self at this point to be fairly close to an open book. I was pregnant at 17 and delivered my son at 18, didn't finish high school but did complete my GED the year I would have graduated, and I am a first-generation student. Neither parent continued education beyond their GED/diploma.

In this affirmation of her willingness to include details about her life in this case study, Dawna shared multiple identities that characterize her as a student from populations traditionally underrepresented on college campuses: first generation, GED, and teen mother. Although first-generation students (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020) and GED recipients (Forrest Cataldi et al., 2018) face challenges and barriers to college completion, Dawna's identity as a teen mother is associated with even lower graduation rates. However, Dawna is on track to join the 3% of women who have a child when they are 18–19 years old who go on to earn a 4-year college degree before age 30 (Hoffman, 2006). An analysis of the reading and math achievement trajectories of children born to teen mothers compared to older mothers suggests that Dawna's educational achievements may also have a favorable impact on her children because maternal education translates to "positive achievement outcomes for the next generation, particularly for those children who may be most at risk for poor outcomes" (Tang et al., 2014, p. 190).

Four years before I met Dawna, another student, Hannah, who also became a mother as a teenager, led me to better understand how the responsibilities of parenting can impact academic performance. Hannah and I met in a required general education course that I teach; it focuses on diversity, ethics, and civics. The final project for the course is an action plan for addressing a human rights issue that the student cares about. In researching how to reduce teen pregnancy rates, Hannah "stumbled across Idaho's sex education law. It hadn't changed since it was written in 1970" (Manny, 2018, paras. 4–5). Hannah proposed revising the legislation to reflect medically accurate information, and her idea was so good that I encouraged her to try to make the change happen. I joined her in the attempt; our citizen lobbying initiative has not yet succeeded. However, our experiences led to my having the opportunity to teach the course about advocacy described in this article.

My connection to Hannah also had a deep impact by propelling me further along the journey of recognizing, processing, and releasing misperceptions and biases. When I began my career in higher education in 2001, I taught in ways that privileged full-time, traditional-aged, residential students. Although I professed commitment to diversity, I had layers of subconscious and implicit bias—and I did not yet even know those concepts existed. My own experiences as a White, cisgender, heterosexual woman who grew up in a middle-class family with two parents who attended college and showered me with opportunities provided me with advantages that I did not recognize. The more I learned about Hannah's

successes and challenges, the better I became at identifying the unintended consequences some of my pedagogical choices could have on students whose lives were unlike mine. By the time I met Dawna, I had implemented pedagogical practices to support parenting and caregiving students, which I described in an earlier publication about removing barriers to student success (Fry, 2020).

In the sections that follow, I explain the course setting, present literature that influences my approach to service-learning, describe the community partnerships, present Dawna's story, and share the supportive response of our community partners. I conclude with four lessons learned from Dawna's journey through the pandemic that are generalizable for higher education faculty seeking to strengthen their support for all students in service-learning courses: exercising solidarity, reciprocity, and flexibility; guiding students in project selection; serving as a model learner; and embedding support for parenting and caregiving students.

The Setting: A New Course About Advocacy

In spring 2020, I taught the inaugural offering of a course called Advocacy in Action. The course was designed to engage students in human rights advocacy campaigns through service-learning. The goal was to enable students to develop relevant skills that are used in advocacy while exploring various relevant strategies, tactics, personal attributes, external factors, and local community elements. The course is part of the requirements to earn a certificate in human rights at Boise State University in Idaho. Other requirements for the certificate include courses about the history of human rights, collaboration and communication skills, and navigating power within systems and institutions.

I developed Advocacy in Action with input and insights from a myriad of resources. The course description reflected input from state legislators who have a history of advocating for human rights, including Idaho's first Black state senator, Cherie Buckner-Webb (see Buckner-Webb & Thompson, 2021). I sought input from leaders in local nonprofits that advance human rights and have experience navigating the challenges and opportunities posed by local and state politics. While developing the course, I participated in a social action webinar series for faculty, which was organized by Scott Myers-Lipton, whose scholarship includes a guide to college student advocacy (see Myers-Lipton, 2017). Community organizing scholar and activist Marshall Ganz's (Ganz, 2009; Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education, 2019; *What Is a Public Narrative and How Can We Use It?*, 2013) work further influenced my approach and course design. Because the service-learning component was fundamental to the course, I present some of the literature that influenced my approach to service-learning in the separate section that follows.

A Citizenship Framework for Service-Learning

My approach to service-learning is informed by my background in social studies education, the academic discipline intended to help students develop "the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2020, para. 1). Over the last decade I have endeavored to create service-learning experiences that invite students to move beyond what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) described as personally responsible citizenship to participatory and justice-oriented citizenship. A personally responsible citizen is, for example, a law-abiding taxpayer who recycles and is inclined to volunteer in times of crisis. This framework for citizenship is what is most commonly taught in K-12 education, which may reinforce "a conservative and individualistic notion of citizenship. Yet . . . if citizenship also requires collective participation and critical analysis of social structures, then other lenses are needed as well" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 264). The participatory orientation is framed by the assumption that to improve society, "citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 240). As an example, the personally responsible citizen donates food for the hungry, whereas the participatory citizen organizes a food drive.

The participatory citizen works within established systems, but those who have adopted a justice orientation "must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injus-

tice over time" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 240). Justice-oriented citizens seek to analyze and address the root cause of social issues and injustices, and would examine why community members are hungry and develop a long-lasting action plan. Being a justice-oriented citizen means seeking to dismantle inequities and thus requires long-term commitment, comprehensive strategies and tactics, and a far-reaching vision.

When I first applied Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) ideas to my teaching, I shared a summary of their framework with my students. I presented one of their tables (p. 241) that identifies characteristics, example actions, and core assumptions about each kind of citizen. Personally responsible is on the left, participatory in the middle, and justice-oriented on the right. Although I intended to use the table as a conversation starter to help students reflect on the kinds of educational experiences that had helped them develop skills in the respective areas, the conversation quickly grew intense and heated. Students viewed the table as a rubric, and many felt insulted by the implication that if they were operating as personally responsible citizens, they were the equivalent of "C" citizens. More than half of the students in that class held identities that are underrepresented in college, and, at least at that moment in their lives, the contributions made by participatory ("B") citizens and justice-oriented ("A") citizens seemed beyond reach. Although I had envisioned a discussion that would lead us to explore how to enhance our participatory and justice-orientation skills, my approach created an environment where my students felt judged and closed off to discussion about citizenship.

Rodriguez and Janke's (2016) insights are relevant here: They posited that because students and faculty may hold different perspectives about citizenship, we can end up "talking past" one another. These scholars pointed out that "one's orientation to civic engagement may influence their perception of what is or is not civic engagement. Therefore, faculty members' ability to make learning relevant for students" (p. 179) is challenged. They recommended that faculty "be proactive in understanding how students conceptualize civic engagement at the beginning of their courses and foster opportunities for students to expand their existing knowledge and application of those concepts in relation to academic course content" (p. 188). Rodriguez and Janke also underscored the value of faculty explicitly sharing their notions of citizenship that guide course discussion and experiences.

I contend that Rodriguez and Janke's (2016) insights are particularly important when teaching courses where students may actually be averse to the justice orientation (e.g., Fry & O'Brien, 2017). My unsuccessful first experience introducing students to Westheimer and Kahne (2004) likely resulted from my keeping my notions of citizenship implicit instead of making them explicit as Rodriguez and Janke recommended. In contrast, in the advocacy course that is the backdrop to Dawna's case study, we begin the semester with shared notions about citizenship. That is not the case in other courses I teach. Students seeking to earn the human rights certificate are enrolled in the advocacy course *because* they want to engage in what Mitchell (2008) called critical service-learning. Mitchell emphasized the redistribution of power as an essential part of an approach to service-learning in higher education that contributes to change and supports social justice.

More recently, Barrera et al. (2017) pointed out that intentional course design is essential to providing students with the opportunity to unpack how power and privilege manifest in their service-learning experiences and pose barriers to social justice. Carnicelli and Boluk (2017) examined how deep reflection about service-learning helps to transform students' understanding of social justice. One of their central recommendations was to use reflection and collaboration to upend the educational status quo where students are passive and teachers are in control.

Transformative educational experiences are essential to supporting students in developing the skills and dispositions (National Council for the Social Studies, 2020) that are foundational to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) justice-oriented citizen. The service-learning opportunity in the advocacy course I taught when COVID-19 emerged was designed to give students the opportunity to engage in collaborative justice-oriented projects.

Influenced by Galura (2017), Phelps (2012), and Sigmon (1997), I endeavored to create opportunities where service and learning would be of equal weight. Ideally, students

contribute to a community partner's work in a meaningful way *and* they develop skills and knowledge related to course goals. I appreciated the importance of this balance because early in my academic career I taught in a program that had an out-of-balance focus on students' learning, such that community partners seemed to provide all of the service by giving students a place to learn. Clifford (2017) offered insights that unpack that imbalance: The program was striving for a product-centered form of reciprocity instead of long-term connections built in solidarity. Too often, the former contributes to "an environment in which deliverables and checklists of outcomes define success" (Clifford, 2017, p. 13) for students.

Dostilio et al. (2012) offered relevant clarification about reciprocity in service-learning: It is a foundational concept that "is frequently referred to in the literature without precise conceptualization or critical examination" (p. 18). The plausibility of practitioners' using the term with different meaning seems to contribute to Clifford's (2017) concern that reciprocity may lead to the problematic notion of students "making a difference" by completing a set number of hours of service. Despite endeavoring to move away from charity, reciprocity can perpetuate inequity because completing an arbitrary number of hours "does not create structural change in society and is distanced from social justice" (p. 7). Meaningful alternatives to product-centered or exchange-based approaches to service-learning may emerge when faculty frame reciprocity as "interrelatedness of beings and the broader world around them as well as the potential synergies that emerge from their relationships" (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 23). The description of interrelatedness draws from Indigenous ways of meaning making, which often place emphasis on community over the individual and "disrupt the traditionally linear, anthropocentric, and time-limited ways of approaching reciprocity" (Dostilio et al., 2012, p. 28). Kimmerer (2015), a botanist and enrolled member of the Citizen Band Potawatomi, noted that "reciprocity is a key to success" (p. 262). Kimmerer (2013) also described an Indigenous notion of interrelatedness:

> For much of human's time on the planet, before the great delusion, we lived in cultures that understood the covenant of reciprocity, that for the Earth to stay in balance, for the gifts to continue to flow, we must give back in equal measure for what we take.
>
> In the teachings of my Potawatomi ancestors, responsibilities and gifts are understood as two sides of the same coin. The possession of a gift is coupled with a duty to use it for the benefit of all. (paras. 4–5)

Collectively, Kimmerer, Dostilio et al., and Clifford left me wondering: How can I create service-learning expectations that avoid the checklists and time measurements that students are used to being judged by, focus on meaningful contributions to our community partners' work, and collaboratively build a connection with our partners that may lead to meaningful, long-term relationships built in solidarity and reciprocity? In the section that follows, I provide a detailed description of the community partnership in which Dawna participated—in spring 2020, it was a brand new partnership that I hoped would develop in ways that honored best practices of reciprocity and solidarity.

A New Community Partnership

A hands-on service-learning experience with a community partner is a central component of the advocacy course, so students could learn how one organization attempts to change social structures in order to promote human rights, while also being of service to the organization's efforts. I offered students the choice of two projects during the spring 2020 semester. Dawna participated in the project with the Idaho Access Project, a new local organization founded to "eliminate physical, attitudinal, and policy barriers to ensure people with disabilities can live, work, and play in our neighborhoods and communities" (Idaho Access Project, 2020, para. 1). The cofounders are a trio of forward-thinking individuals with disabilities who turned to Boise State University to build service-learning connections so students could contribute to their pursuit of more accessible communities. I met Idaho Access Project's founding board members, Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy, a mere 6 weeks before teaching the advocacy class for the first time. Our relationship was new, the organization was new, and the class was new!

My students were invited to help develop

a proposal for a mayor's advisory council on disabilities. Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy identified this as a need after conducting a neighborhood access review (Idaho Access Project, 2019) to systematically evaluate how livable and welcoming one specific neighborhood in Boise is for people using a mobility device, who have low vision or are blind, are deaf or hard of hearing, have a cognitive or intellectual disability, or have a mental health condition. Extensive barriers to livability were identified, and Idaho Access Project recommended that our city create a mayor's advisory council as a meaningful way to form a focused effort to increase accessibility.

When I presented my students with two social advocacy projects, I encouraged them to choose by considering their level of interest in each topic *and* by thinking about whether they would benefit from a more or less structured project. The second option was a health care legislative advocacy project with a local affiliate of a national organization; that project involved more than 5 hours of structured training for lobbying and participation in an all-day advocacy event at our state capitol building with mentoring from experienced advocates. In contrast, the approach to developing the proposal for a mayor's advisory council involved a blend of collaborative decision making and independent research.

Instead of focusing on their strengths and needs as learners, the majority of my students chose based on interest in the topic. Since half of my students had an immediate family member with a disability, the mayor's advisory council was popular because of the opportunity to contribute to something that could have a direct and positive impact on their families. This reliance on interest over consideration of learning styles and strengths led one student, a self-proclaimed procrastinator, to already be behind on their contributions to the project when COVID-19 transformed the second half of our semester. The highly structured lobbying project might have served this student better, and likewise, the single parent with demanding parenting responsibilities might have felt more successful with lobbying. In the Lessons Learned section of this article, I present the possibilities of more guidance for project selection. However, Dawna, whose story is featured in the case study that follows this section, did consider the merits of more or less structure as well as her interests.

What neither Dawna nor I knew was how COVID-19 would upend her work, home, and school life. The last time we were together in person was March 12, 2020. Dawna, her classmates, and I spent the first half of our 75-minute class period talking about the emerging pandemic. We were all concerned about the health crisis many countries already faced and the growing numbers of cases in the United States. Our university had scheduled a test day for remote instruction on March 13, and students expressed concerns that it might be more than a test—it might be a transition to completing the semester online. I offered reassurance that we could still meaningfully continue our class remotely if necessary. Their concerns proved valid: Our university shifted to fully remote instruction on March 16, joining institutions across the country in the effort to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Reflecting back, I realize I was naïve about the depth of the challenges ahead. Yes, I had thought through using remote technology for class discussions and writing consultations, and those aspects of the class did in fact translate to remote instruction. However, my use of technology during class time could not remove what proved to be insurmountable communication barriers to my students' completing their service-learning projects. The complexity of Dawna's situation as a parent and essential worker led to challenges I also had not anticipated when I assured my students that we would have no problem finishing the semester remotely.

Dawna's Case Study: Parent, Essential Worker, and Student

Dawna is an impressive person who balances a myriad of responsibilities. In addition to being a student, she is mother of two school-aged children and an assistant manager at an essential business. The mayor's advisory council project appealed to her due to the nature of the topic as well as the opportunity to utilize her organizational skills. The lobbying project was of limited interest because, as a social work major, she had participated in lobbying events during our state's legislative session with other students, professors, and professional social workers. The advisory council offered the opportunity to develop new skills. She had been a leading contributor to the project

design when COVID-19 upended the balance she had created between the interconnected facets of her life as a parent, worker, and student.

COVID-19 led to a tremendous shift in Dawna's parental and employment responsibilities. Overnight, her children were learning remotely from home, as was Dawna when our university shifted to fully remote instruction. Her boss incorrectly assumed that because her university classes were now remote, she could work more hours. Dawna's children were 11 and 7 years old when the pandemic hit; while she was working extended hours, child care was essential but also challenging to secure. Dawna's usual place for child care ceased to be an option because the staff feared her children's coughing and runny noses were symptoms of COVID-19 and not their usual seasonal allergies. Supporting her children in the transition to a world transformed, working overtime, and trying to stay on top of her own classes was already a lot. The need for child care leads us to explore three additional, interconnected layers of complexity in Dawna's life: child care, internet access, and relationship dynamics.

First, Dawna's cousin offered to provide child care. This was a tremendous help; however, the cousin lived 40 minutes away from her home, which meant more time commuting. The second issue pertained to internet access; her cousin lived in a community that coincidentally experienced internet issues for approximately one month during our state's shelter-in-place directive. Much of Dawna's schoolwork required internet access, and she simply could not do her work from her cousin's house. She explored the possibility of accessing that community's public library WiFi; it had been shut down when the brick-and-mortar structure closed because of the pandemic. Third, Dawna and her husband were living apart at the start of the pandemic; it was a temporary separation to give them literal and figurative space for reflection while working through some relationship challenges. Her husband is supportive of her role as a student, and they tried to work as a team to handle all of the new complexities that emerged as the pandemic unfolded. Child care, relationship dynamics, and access to the internet to complete her own schoolwork would have been enough to navigate; however, Dawna's role as an essential worker led to more demands on her increasingly scarce time.

I digress briefly from Dawna's story to note that she did not share the details of her separation with me during the spring 2020 semester. She shared that aspect of her personal life while we collaborated to write this article. I already held Dawna in high regard. She exemplified Drago's (2010) point that parenting is hard work and "to make a commitment to higher education at the same time is nothing short of heroic" (para. 1). That Dawna and her husband were also investing time and energy to build a stronger relationship added a layer of complexity to her life. They have succeeded in growing stronger and remain a couple. Dawna's husband even read drafts of this case study, adding his memories of the demanding time they faced together. That they were already working to strengthen and preserve their relationship is an important backdrop to Dawna's demanding schedule as an essential worker.

Dawna ended up working overtime when employees resigned due to fears of contracting COVID-19, leaving her with less time to devote to school despite possessing effective time-management skills. Our class met twice a week, and one of the meeting times overlapped with when delivery trucks came to her workplace. She was asked to work because there were not enough staff members to help unload the trucks. When she told me this I remember saying, "I can think of no better reason to miss class—there might be toilet paper on that truck!" Although my tone was lighthearted, the reality was that fear had led some people to stockpile resources, creating a scarcity of nonperishable items like hand sanitizer and toilet paper (Alford, 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Murphy, 2020). People who had not been able to stockpile needed the goods Dawna helped to unload. Dawna's work situation made it clear that my previous expectations for attendance were irrelevant in a learning environment transformed by a global pandemic.

Giving Dawna's case study the name "Parent, Essential Worker, and Student" was intentional; that sequence reflects Dawna's de facto ranking of priorities. At times, the demands placed on her at work made it hard to keep parenting as Number 1. It would have been deeply inappropriate for me to try to pressure her to place her commitment as a student in my class higher on that list. Although she endeavored

to continue her contributions to the mayor's advisory council, she ran into barriers. Specifically, she had planned to research the history of disability advisory councils in multiple communities in our state. Her research plan included phone conversations with individuals who were involved with these councils, and she initiated her contact via email shortly before businesses and schools closed due to COVID-19. Her emails went unanswered, presumably because those she reached out to faced challenges as they adjusted to the demands of life in a global pandemic. In contrast, 6 months later, my fall 2020 students made similar outreach efforts and received prompt and enthusiastic responses. Although the specter of COVID-19 remained strong in fall 2020, by then many people had adapted and found ways to persevere in the midst of the tumult.

Although all of my students, even those in positions of relative privilege, were impacted by the pandemic in compelling ways, Dawna's story underscores how existing societal inequities played out. These inequities were apparent just a few weeks into the shutdown, as Scheiber et al. (2020) pointed out:

> In some respects, the pandemic is an equalizer: It can afflict princes and paupers alike, and no one who hopes to stay healthy is exempt from the strictures of social distancing. But the American response to the virus is laying bare class divides that are often camouflaged—in access to health care, child care, education, living space, even internet bandwidth. (para. 4)

Dawna's story could easily have been featured as an example in the article about the pandemic's unequal impact:

> the rich holed up in vacation properties; the middle class marooned at home with restless children; the working class on the front lines of the economy, stretched to the limit by the demands of work and parenting, if there is even work to be had. (para. 9)

Dawna's husband was also an essential worker and faced a demanding work schedule. They both were on the front lines, unlike those retreating to second homes or figuring out the intricacies of working from home while navigating a pandemic. However, to make Dawna's story complete requires describing her incredible resilience, which includes advocacy for herself and others.

Dawna achieved a noteworthy accomplishment during this challenging time. She collaborated with two other staff members and persuaded the company she worked for to provide crisis pay for hourly workers at 17 stores. The salary increase was back-paid to mid-March and had a positive impact on her take-home salary as well. Dawna's collaborative efforts contributed to her coworkers' financial well-being and meant their increased exposure to COVID-19 was acknowledged by regional management. The latter provided a much-needed morale boost in a time of uncertainty and confusion about how to stay safe from the virus. Several months later I asked Dawna about her workplace advocacy: Was it something she learned from the course, felt more confidence taking on because of the course, or is it an example of her being extraordinary? She responded: "I personally feel it was a mix of all three. I felt (and do feel) more confident in advocacy because of the course and with the skills learned from the course, as well as, continued advocacy efforts." When she shared her advocacy efforts during a remote class meeting in April 2020, she mentioned that her mother's approach to navigating requests was an influence as well: "Hope for the best, expect the worst, and shoot for somewhere in the middle." Dawna's workplace advocacy also included asking for child care support; she was not the only parent essential worker facing challenges. Unfortunately, child care support from the company never came to fruition.

Although I initially was concerned about Dawna and my other students being able to meet course learning outcomes that were aligned with their social action projects, Dawna's advocacy at work allowed her to exceed two goals I included on the syllabus:

1. Develop communication and collaboration skills while deepening understanding of course material through an engagement project with a local organization that does social change work, and
2. Develop and apply written, oral, and visual skills necessary to communicate

and advance advocacy goals.

Dawna collaborated with coworkers to communicate a need. She even had an impressive victory in her advocacy effort. These experiences supplemented her class learning. However, without support from our community partners, the mayor's advisory council work would come to a halt.

Supportive and Responsive Community Partners

Like Dawna, the other advocacy students participating in the mayor's advisory council project faced difficulty in their efforts to connect with the people they needed to speak to in order to complete their research. Our community partners exhibited understanding and compassion in their communication with the group, as indicated by a March 31, 2020, email:

> We're just checking in to see: 1) how you're doing/coping with the COVID-19 related changes/challenges, 2) if you wanted to connected [*sic*] via Zoom in the next week or so, 3) how the project is or isn't moving forward (expectations on our end are that it will be difficult to connect with anyone in government with all that's going on). Mostly we want to just make sure you're all doing okay. The last time I experienced anything like this was on 911, and at least you could go outside. So I can't imagine how disruptive this is with families, work, AND school. Thanks for all you're doing.

Our community partners' first point was about how students were doing and coping, an ordering of items that reflects shared humanity and compassion about the collective demands of adjusting to life in a pandemic. Five months later, I asked them about the email. Jeremy noted that he, Dianna, and Dana were most "worried about the impact on students who were far away from home when things were falling apart." Their concern was appropriate; although the lasting impact of COVID-19 on students is not yet known, early research in response to the pandemic indicates the uncertainty and rapid change has had a negative impact on many students' mental health (Anderson, 2020; Son et al., 2020).

Our community partners made it easy for students to share challenges in their personal lives as well as barriers to completing their research. Dawna's response to Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy's email included

> My work schedule has been crazy lately as well as finding childcare. Most of the contacts I had reached out to are not in office currently and I have not been able to get in touch with [them]. I am still trying to gather as much information as possible, though it is slow moving. Thank you for reaching out and being understanding of everything.

Within weeks of the pandemic shutting down schools and places of work in the United States, resources emerged about how to achieve a balance between life and work, especially when working from home (e.g., Minnesota Department of Health, 2020; Potkewitz, 2020; Ward & Feiereisen, 2020). The email conversation highlighted Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy's understanding that the students faced an unprecedented set of challenges in finding balance that was a struggle for many even before the pandemic. As Collins (2020) explained, "it's all too easy (and, more often than not, encouraged) for us to define our worth by the volume of work we're able to accomplish in any given day" (para. 1). Had we required students to strive for the kind of product-centered, exchange-based service-learning Clifford (2017) lamented, students would have been left with no way to succeed or be deemed "worthy" of a high grade. It became clear that I needed to redefine what success meant for our community engagement project as the contributions that seemed reasonable when my community partners and I designed the project were no longer feasible.

In early April, we suspended the project. The delay necessitated by the pandemic gave us the opportunity to embrace Clifford's (2017) recommendation that service-learning projects need to allow students "to see models of authentic relationships that support systemic change rather than . . . producing deliverables as measures of their level of engagement" (p. 11). When the envisioned outcomes became impossible, our community partners responded and worked with me and the students in a supportive way. Essentially, Dawna and her classmates saw—and benefited from—a demonstration

of the kind of strong, collaborative community relationship Clifford said was central to ensuring that service-learning is able to "foment our connections to social justice—and to reaffirm our collaboration *with*, not *for*, the community" (p. 15, emphasis original). Embracing *with* is particularly important since the Idaho Access Project promotes accessibility for people with disabilities. The slogan "Nothing about us without us" has been widely used in disability advocacy, and Garaghty (n.d.) explained how those words have been used

> to demand inclusion in policy and decision-making processes that shaped their lives and environments. They used these words to forcefully condemn paternalism and the medical community's deficit-based labelling of their minds and bodies. Wielded by people with disabilities, "Nothing about us without us" preceded a sea-change in the language and goals of disability policy. (para. 4)

Clifford wrote about collaborating *with* community partners and emphasized that social justice should be the focus of service-learning, whereas Garaghty provided an example of how moving away from action *without* community input was essential to overcoming the degrading legacy of decisions made *for* those with disabilities.

My students could not meaningfully complete the goal product unless they could talk *with* people connected to existing mayor's advisory councils. The pandemic made that process temporarily unachievable. Instead of completing the envisioned final assignments, I asked students to write letters to my fall students inviting them to participate in the project and finish what the previous class had begun. Dawna's letter explained how plans were halted, and

> students participating in this project had completed some research, and others ran into troubles with getting in contact with people they were reaching out to. The documents containing the research have been shared with [our] professor and can be shared with you. I am hopeful that this next group of students during the Fall 2020 semester will be able to pick up where we had left off and make greater progress than we were able to. I am excited to see that this project is going to continue on and won't be left in the past and forgotten about, as it is an important topic and mission to work for.

Although Dawna's journey in the course came to a close with her sharing resources and wisdom with my future students, her story of resilience in the pandemic continued. She completed the spring and fall 2020 semesters and is scheduled to graduate in 2021. We turn now to generalizable lessons learned through following Dawna's experiences during COVID-19.

Lessons Learned in a Global Pandemic

I offer four generalizable lessons learned from Dawna's journey through the tumult of COVID-19.

Lesson 1: Solidarity, Reciprocity, and Flexibility

The service-learning project my community partners Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy and I designed for spring 2020 was shaped by notions of solidarity and reciprocity. As leaders of a new organization embarking on an ambitious set of goals to improve accessibility in Boise, they were excited to have students support the work and add new insights. However, as Clifford (2017) pointed out, many "students who have become habituated to the traditional or transactional" (p. 15) service-learning will be resistant to a model more centered on solidarity and its emphasis on relationship building. This proved true for some of my students who found it challenging to step away from checklists and time logs familiar in transactional models of service-learning. Before COVID-19 turned my living room into a remote classroom and made student contributions to the project difficult at best, I had fielded questions about how many hours they should "put in." During the first half of the semester, students working on the mayor's advisory project had in-person discussions with Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy about how to design the research. This bottom-up approach was meant to provide a collaborative design for the project. Aside from to-do lists and a calendar, the planning meetings did not yield any deliverables, nor did Dianna, Dana, and Jeremy expect

measurable products at this point. This was hard for many of the students in the project, who were used to what Dostilio et al. (2012) described as product-driven and transactional notions of service-learning.

In retrospect, the opportunity to help build the vision for a mayor's advisory council from the bottom up was too much of a stretch for my students, given the realities of their biographies of school. To be successful, they needed more support to move past entrenched patterns of thinking. Feiman-Nemser (2001) offered insights from K-12 teacher preparation that seem relevant here. Biography can shape and limit abilities to "form new ideas and new habits of thought and action" (p. 1016). Teacher education scholarship has identified how intentional experiences can help teachers consider, and potentially move past, their biographies. That my spring 2020 students had difficulty finding value in a bottom-up process that was not designed to produce measurable deliverables suggests the need to create experiences that help students move past their biographies of school. Additionally, offering more guidance in project selection emerged as a lesson learned.

Lesson 2: Provide Guidance in Project Selection

Providing the opportunity for student choice in service-learning placements has merit. Choice supports Clifford's (2017) notions of solidarity and may have a favorable impact on student learning outcomes (Vaughan & Cunningham, 2016). At the same time, Dawna was unique among the students who participated in the mayor's advisory council project in that she chose that project by considering her level of interest *and* by thinking about whether she would benefit more from the highly structured project or the open-ended option. Most of the students on that project team were guided by interest. Although I asked students to consider both options, I did not offer direct guidance in *how* to do that. In retrospect, such guidance might have helped some students make different choices or make the same choice with more awareness of how the different structure for each project might impact them as learners.

Remote options for community engagement seem likely to remain essential until COVID-19 is contained. It is appropriate to offer remote possibilities beyond the pandemic because of the flexibility that students like Dawna need. Guiding students through a thoughtful selection process seems all the more essential when service-learning is remote.

Lesson 3: Faculty Can Serve as Model Learners

Although best practices for service-learning describe the importance of linking course learning outcomes and reflection assignments to the service (e.g., Pawlowski, 2018), another powerful approach is for faculty to serve as model learners. That idea is inspired by St. John's College (n.d.), a liberal arts college where faculty members have an opportunity that is unique in academia: Instead of lecturing or otherwise demonstrating scholarly expertise, faculty lead students in learning by facilitating discussion and guiding inquiry. Faculty serve as role models for how to engage in these processes; the approach is grounded in the idea that learning is a cooperative endeavor. Although I have never even visited the campus, I was inspired by the approach when I first read about it decades ago. I have long sought to present myself as a model learner. I am not always successful—the pressure to make it through learning goals in the rush of a 15-week semester often makes it feel more efficient to assume the conventional role of expert.

However, it was easy to embrace my role as a model learner when teaching the advocacy course Dawna took, perhaps because the course was brand new. Service-learning provides one of two foundational components of the course; the second is learning from human rights advocates who join our class as guest speakers. Guests share their various approaches to advocating for social change, including the tactics and strategies they use to work toward their goals. I take notes using the same guiding prompts I provide students so that I can learn along with them as our guests share their unique insights and experiences. I have found that this approach helps me make connections to their service-learning projects and strengthens my understanding of course readings. When the intersections between readings, guest advocates, and service-learning become clearer to me, I can better help students make connections. I believe I am a better teacher because I join my students as a learner.

Being a model learner means embracing a quality that Brown (2012) described as vul-

nerability. Brown maintained that authenticity and connections come from vulnerability. Authentic connections are essential to engage with students as the complete human beings they are—people with hearts and spirits as well as minds (Schoem et al., 2017). Schoem et al. remind us that teaching the whole student is central to the mission of higher education, connected to student success, and can help "students find meaning and purpose in their lives" (p. xi). The pandemic made their words seem more salient; however, these words of inspiration to attend to building caring connections with students were published more than 2 years before COVID-19 upended the educational landscape and expanded many students' needs for support.

Paramount among students' support needs are those specific to mental health. Schoem (2017) responded to earlier research indicating the widespread prevalence of mental health challenges like anxiety and depression among college students by pointing out that many

> may be entering our classrooms with a high degree of intellectual curiosity and motivation to succeed, but for too many, their hearts and bodies are necessarily focused more on their emotional health. For some, just getting to class is a huge victory. (p. 3)

"Getting" to class in a pandemic means remote options for many, and preliminary research about COVID-19's impact on students' mental health indicates the problem has deepened (Anderson, 2020; Son et al., 2020). Responding to the needs of the whole student has a heightened level of importance.

Dawna's case study unpacks one story of the whole student—she's a parent and essential worker, and then a student. Her journey highlights the myriad of ways the pandemic created challenges. Supportive responses from me and her other professors helped Dawna succeed in the challenging spring 2020 semester, and she continued her studies into the fall 2020 semester. However, millions of other students have different stories to tell. For example, the pandemic led more than 16 million students to cancel plans to attend college in fall 2020. Among those 16 million, students from families with annual incomes of $75,000 or less are disproportionately reflected compared to those from families with incomes of more than $100,000 (Long & Douglas-Gabriel, 2020).

Cruse, Mendez, and Holtzman (2020) pointed out that for students who are also parents or caregivers, "vulnerabilities are rising to new heights, threatening their ability to keep their families healthy and secure on top of maintaining their studies remotely" (p. 1). When faculty embrace the role of model learners in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we acknowledge that we are in this crisis together—with our students. We cannot know all the answers for how to best support students in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. From a place of authenticity, we can better build connections (Brown, 2012) that will help us support student success for as long as COVID-19 shapes our higher education experiences, and ideally continue supportive practices after the pandemic.

I hope authenticity will remain even after (or if) the pandemic ceases to be a factor because students have a myriad of life responsibilities that will continue to shape their experiences. For parenting students in particular, who represent 22% of undergraduates in the United States (Gault, Holtzman, & Cruse, 2020), our willingness to prioritize student success may have a positive multigenerational impact (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Tang et al., 2014).

Lesson 4. Embed Support for Parenting and Caregiving Students in *All* Courses

Dawna's journey pointedly reminds us that parents and caregiving students have life circumstances that necessitate flexible options and supportive relationships with their professors. I present a brief summary of data that describes parenting and caregiving undergraduates to demonstrate the social justice imperative to support this population.

Cruse, Holtzman, et al.'s (2019) review of data collected by the United States Department of Education revealed that 22% of the undergraduate population are parents or have a caregiving role for children under 18. Seventy percent of those parents are mothers, and the majority of those mothers are single: 62%. In contrast, 61% of students who are fathers are married. Comparing parents to nonparents reveals another concerning disparity: 53% of parents left school after 6 years without

a degree, whereas 31% of nonparents did so (Nelson & Gault, 2013). Although both sets of numbers indicate a need for universities to improve completion rates, the situation is particularly dire for one subset of parents: a mere 28% of single mothers who enroll in college earn a degree within 6 years (Kruvelis et al., 2017).

Single mothers are disproportionately women of color (Gault, Cruse, & Kruvelis, 2017), and Black students who are parents accrue more student loan debt than parenting and nonparenting students from other racial backgrounds (Cruse, Holtzman, et al., 2019). Cruse, Holtzman, et al.'s holistic analysis of student loan debt for all parents, single and married, is also grim: Data from 2015–2016 indicated that parents' median debt was more than double that of nonparents. In contrast to these discouraging statistics, Cruse, Holtzman, et al. also found that 33% of parents earn GPAs of 3.5 and higher. This is a positive contrast to the overall population of students: 29% earn 3.5 or higher. Only 26% of dependent students achieve this level of academic success.

The term "caregiving" is also used to describe a role held by many students who are not parents: One in four Millennials serve in a caregiving role for an adult family member. More than half of those young caregivers are African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, or Asian American/Pacific Islanders (National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2020). Seven in 10 caregiving students reported that the emotional strain of their role impacted their academic performance (Horovitz, 2020).

The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges for students who are parents and caregivers. Israelsen-Hartley (2020) pointed out that in addition to facing the physical and psychological challenges of life in a pandemic, parenting students faced the loss of "many resources [they] rely on to be successful: on-campus child care centers, in-person study groups, internet access, and in-person K-12 education for their kids" (para. 10). In the midst of the spring 2020 shutdown, campus libraries, which can be a welcoming resource for parents (Keyes, 2017), also closed. Additionally, prior to the pandemic, more than 2/3 of parenting students lived at or near the poverty line (Cruse, Mendez, & Holtzman, 2020), leaving them more vulnerable to the economic impact of COVID-19.

If social justice is to be at the heart of service-learning (Clifford, 2017) and other forms of community engagement, faculty need to ensure that students with parenting and caregiving responsibilities can participate in this powerful form of learning. Traditional attend-in-person models of service-learning that students must fit in outside existing class and work schedules may be a particular barrier. As Lewis (2020) pointed out, it is common for faculty to

> cling to an outdated view of who college students are—young people on the cusp of adulthood with few responsibilities. But that's no longer the case. Because of this outdated notion, very few colleges even keep data on whether their students are parents. (para. 4)

Dawna's case study and the statistical outcomes that describe parenting students make it clear that faculty have a powerful opportunity to contribute to student success by embedding support into their course design. Cheyney (2020) offered concrete examples of family-friendly language to include in syllabi and granted permission for faculty to use the text. I included it in my courses beginning in spring 2019. Before the pandemic closed in-person instruction, Dawna took me at my/Cheyney's word:

> I understand that minor illnesses and unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to choose between missing class to stay home with a child and leaving him or her with someone you or the child does not feel comfortable with. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable. (para. 4)

Dawna brought her son and daughter to class in February. Later she told me that although she had other professors mention that bringing a child to class could be possible, this syllabus language was the first time she felt that she could do so without having to ask permission or negotiate. In other classes, she opted to miss class when child care fell through. Her feedback indicates that there is value in having direct language that empowers students to make the choices they need to succeed.

To be inclusive and use supportive language in our syllabi is to embrace Denial's (2019) pedagogy of kindness. At the heart of this pedagogy is "believing people, and believing *in* people" (para. 5). Denial's approach sends a message to students that they matter "exactly as they are and even because of the challenges they face" (para. 15). We cannot separate students from their other life roles. Embracing Schoem et al.'s (2017) whole student means supporting their success in community engagement by reducing barriers that affect specific populations like parents and caregivers.

Conclusion

COVID-19 forced educators to adopt remote learning approaches at an unprecedented pace. We can turn to scholarship for insights about how to use technology to facilitate service-learning relationships at a distance (e.g., García-Gutierrez et al., 2017; Harris, 2017) and collaborative online reflection (Smit & Tremethick, 2017). Although faculty can say that the educational landscape that emerged with COVID-19 was forced upon us, it is more uplifting to focus on how the pandemic provided us with an opportunity to reflect on what matters most and implement more supportive pedagogy. Wilhelm, Baker, and Dube (2001) offered a helpful process for educators to identify and emphasize what they call "bottom lines." Bottom lines are what we absolutely must achieve with our students during our time together in order to feel that our most important purpose and mission as teachers are fulfilled (Wilhelm, Douglas, & Fry, 2014).

Through reflection on my bottom lines, I realized that I want students to see themselves as agents of social change: people who can help develop and implement solutions to issues of injustice instead of people who hope someone else will address problems. By connecting with our bottom lines—our hearts and spirits—we become more aligned with our whole selves. From that space, we are better able to teach Schoem et al.'s (2017) whole student through Denial's (2019) pedagogy of kindness. As Dawna's story makes clear, students have complex lives. Creating flexible options for community-engaged service-learning invites underrepresented students with work and family responsibilities to participate more fully. COVID-19 unapologetically nudged us all into a place where we have the opportunity to enhance our approach to support success for all students.

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Black and Indigenous Thought in Response to the COVID-19 Reality

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Abstract

Community-engaged learning is being profoundly impacted by the global pandemic and racial reckoning that defines the COVID-19 reality. In order to best respond to this COVID-19 reality, community-engaged scholars and practitioners must draw on the knowledge ways produced by Black and Indigenous thinkers for which the intersection of pandemic and state violence is not new. By addressing the field's assumptions of time and space and interrogating the accompanying practices of White adventure and the "real world" dichotomy, scholars and practitioners have the potential to create a community-engaged learning praxis that will thrive in the new normal created by the interplay of COVID-19 and the movement for Black lives.

Keywords: COVID-19, Black and Indigenous thought, community-engaged learning, scholars, practitioners

Unprecedented, uncertain, difficult: These are the words we muster to describe how COVID-19 has shaped reality in the United States, a reality characterized not only by the global COVID-19 pandemic, but by its synchronicity with the ongoing struggle for Black lives. During spring 2020, as colleges and universities hurriedly transitioned into online learning, COVID-19 case numbers rose in lockstep with the national response to police brutality against members of the Black community. The intersection of ubiquitous viral spread and state violence is familiar to many marginalized communities in the United States, but is particularly intertwined with the historic and present-day experiences of U.S.-based Black and Indigenous communities. Throughout the centuries, colonists turned settlers turned citizens leveraged enslavement (both chattel and carceral) and foreign-born illness, such as smallpox, to contain and control the Black and Indigenous communities whose labor and erasure benefited the nation.

Simultaneous attempts at dehumanization of Blackness through state violence and erasure of Indigeneity by pandemic created a platform on which settler colonial actors built the communities we occupy and study within the field of community engagement today. Yet broader U.S. society views the current interplay of the COVID-19 pandemic and racialized violence as unparalleled. The collective amnesia toward the precedent for this moment is unsurprising given the widespread pedagogical mystification of the United States' colonial history. This piece aims to elucidate what can be learned from Black and Indigenous thinkers for which this COVID-19 reality is anything but new. Community-engaged scholars and practitioners, tasked with developing a more nuanced understanding of place and the forms of knowledge produced within it, must critically consider and explore the intersections of Black and Indigenous thought in order to work toward a new normal for the field of community-engaged learning that is best situated to engage with the COVID-19 reality.

Inspired by 4 years of questioning, learning, and listening alongside community partners from Black and Indigenous communities in and around Los Angeles, the reflections offered here build on and celebrate the work and knowledge born from the grassroots. To

ground our discussion, we will begin with a brief exploration of the shared histories of Black and Indigenous communities in the United States. With this historical context in mind, community-engaged scholars and practitioners will be encouraged to reflect on existing community-engaged learning literature, including place-based education, critical pedagogy of place, and land education. The following section will explore the assumptions made within the field regarding time and space and how these assumptions perpetuate White adventure and the "real world" dichotomy. To connect this exploration to the needs of the COVID-19 reality, this piece ends with suggestions for community-engaged praxis informed by the intersections of Black and Indigenous thought.

Background: A Brief Exploration of Blackness and Indigeneity in the United States

In order to situate our thinking around what can be learned from Black and Indigenous communities who have long experienced pandemic and state violence, let us define these admittedly broad terms. First, we note here that Blackness and Indigeneity do not exist separate from one another. Many, including the Freedmen of the Five Tribes, identify as Black *and* Indigenous and possess particular knowledge ways that will not be explored in this piece. For the purposes of this reflection, the word *Black* will be used to describe people in the United States who are part of the Black and/or African American diaspora. This includes those who are direct descendants of African peoples enslaved by Europeans and forcibly brought to what is now called the United States. The term *Indigenous* will be used to describe peoples from hundreds of distinct tribes who have lived on Turtle Island (North America) since time immemorial. The specificity of ancestral connection to Turtle Island is not to negate the Indigeneity of other Indigenous peoples currently living in the United States, but to help us focus on how the interconnected experiences of Turtle Island Indigenous peoples and members of the Black diaspora speak directly to the current COVID-19 reality in the United States.

Prior to delving into the present day, let us build out our discussion of the historic interconnectivity of Black and Indigenous communities in the United States of America. European expansion to the "new world" first brought Black and Indigenous peoples together on a large scale. The settlement of the new world required the forced labor of Black people and erasure of Indigenous communities in order to establish a viable economic market and a strict social order based on the supremacy of Whiteness. Colonial actors used state-sanctioned violence and unabated viral spread to keep Black and Indigenous peoples within the confines of their social strata. The violence was justified as a means to an end of manifest destiny.

Smallpox is a prime example of a European-born illness that decimated both Black and Indigenous populations. The impact of smallpox on these communities was not solely a product of passive viral spread, but was used as a deliberate colonial tactic, as described by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999): "Stories are told in Canada, for example, of blankets used by smallpox victims being sent into First Nation communities while the soldiers and settlers camped outside waiting for the people to die" (p. 62). The impact of disease in the context Smith describes is physiological, but other thinkers, such as renowned writer James Baldwin, push us to extend our conceptualization of what causes "disease" from the physical to the psychological. Baldwin described the pathologization of colonialism when he recounted his experiences as a Black man living in the United States: "I first contracted some dread, some chronic disease, the unfailing symptom of which is a kind of blind fever, a pounding in the skull and a fire in the bowels" (Baldwin, 1955/1984, p. 96). Other thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon (2004), a trained psychologist born in the French colony of Martinique, have discussed the pathological impacts of colonialism on the body at length and have made a compelling case for the reality of the chronic disease that Baldwin describes.

In response to state violence and widespread pandemic (both physiological and psychological), Black and Indigenous communities created informed conceptions of time and space that envisioned a way to move about the world distinct from the paths outlined by European thought. We can refer to the collection of these conceptions as "ways of knowing." A critical component of community-engaged learning is holding numerous forms of knowledge, or ways of knowing, in conversation with one another. Ways of

knowing are informed by collective and individual experience, cultural ontologies, and language, among other social forces. Now, "to hold alternative knowledge forms is to create the foundation for alternative ways of doing things" (Smith, 1999, p. 36). Some of these alternatives, or Black and Indigenous ways of knowing, are already present, to varying degrees, in community-engaged methodological literature.

Land, Place, and Pedagogical Praxis

Any discussion of Blackness and Indigeneity begins and ends with the land, whether it be the intimate and complex connections between Black and Indigenous peoples and their homelands or their forced dispossession from those same places. It is fitting, then, that our exploration of the presence of Black and Indigenous conceptions of time and space begins with pedagogical practices focused specifically on interacting and learning with the land. Place-based education, critical pedagogy of place, and land education are three pedagogical practices with varying entry points to meaningful discussion of Black and Indigenous thought in community-engaged literature. We will examine both the current utility and shortcomings of these methods, as well as review skills and competencies that could push the methods toward addressing the COVID-19 reality in community-engaged learning.

Place-Based Education

Current literature from the community-engaged learning subdiscipline of place-based education (PBE) regularly discusses the ties of Indigenous and Black communities to place, focusing primarily on these communities' historic interactions with the land. The historicization of Blackness, Indigeneity, and place does not appear to be an intentional pedagogical choice, but a product of PBE's primary focus on the local in its current form (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 9). PBE discusses the "direct bearing on the wellbeing of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). The absence of contemporary discussion of Blackness and Indigeneity in PBE may also be due to an inclination toward rural ecology, which, in the United States context, often becomes a discussion of a predominantly White demographic, despite many Indigenous reservations being situated in rural contexts (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Orr, 1992, 1994; Sobel, 1996; Theobald, 1997; Thomashow, 1996). The shortcomings of PBE lie in its seeming lack of theoretical underpinning. This does not negate its usefulness; rather, it creates space to bring together PBE and a theoretically explicit methodology.

Critical Pedagogy of Place

Critical pedagogy of place, originally proposed by David A. Gruenewald, posits itself as the theoretical backbone of PBE. A critical pedagogy of place stems from critical pedagogy, which draws on the work of scholars such as Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher. Critical pedagogy asserts the importance of grounding teaching and learning in the pursuit of social justice, democracy, and the promotion of *conscientização* or "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17; Giroux, 2007). Akin to critical pedagogy, critical pedagogy of place focuses on how place interacts with, and at times reinforces, the "assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). Drawing further from Freire, a critical pedagogy of place defines *place* not only by its ecology, but as sites inhabited by humans "which mark them and which they also mark" (Freire, 1970, p. 90). A key distinction between PBE and critical pedagogy of place is that the latter accounts for and analyzes the interactions between humans and the land. The theoretical nuance embedded in critical pedagogy of place creates space for a discussion of Blackness and Indigeneity in relation to place. But without explicit language referring to the ties between Blackness, Indigeneity, and place, critical pedagogy of place loses some of its potential power as a methodology in the COVID-19 reality.

Land Education

Land education refers to an array of land-based pedagogical practices that foreground Indigenous ontologies of land. In this context, *Indigenous* refers to any peoples who draw their ancestral heritage to a specific place, which is inclusive of members of the Black/African diaspora who may not know where on the continent their ancestors lived. Land education emphasizes Indigenous language and cosmology as sites of resistance to place-based education that

often assumes a European canonical understanding of the relationship between land and humans (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 8). That is, where the European canon centers the human and evokes sentiments like "I am, therefore place is," land education positions the land itself as the central knowledge bringer, in effect stating, "Land is, therefore we are" (Bang et al., 2014, p. 45). This positionality facilitates an abiding critique of past and present settler colonial projects, including what is referred to as the settler colonial triad (Wolfe 2006). Colonial settlers, Black peoples, and Indigenous peoples make up the settler colonial triad, which "outlines the necessity of also examining the history of chattel slaves (mostly from Africa) who were kept landless and made into property along with Indigenous land as part of the settlement process in the US and elsewhere" (McCoy, 2014, p. 84). The clear relationships within the colonial triad lend credence to land education integrating an analysis of these same relations within the present-day context.

Land education brings together discussions of Blackness and Indigeneity, but it is currently utilized most frequently within the field of environmental studies. This piece will not make the explicit case for land education to be utilized within the field of community-engaged learning, but its potential as a viable methodological practice in the COVID-19 reality is unquestionable. In fact, any of the methodologies discussed here would provide valuable nuance to community-engaged methodology. Place-based education, critical pedagogy of place, and land education outline processes that can foreground Black and Indigenous thought. But these processes are best facilitated by specific skills and competencies outlined within other sections of community-engaged literature that also have space for making Black and Indigenous knowledge ways more explicit.

Skills and Competencies

In order to extend the aforementioned methodologies into daily interactions within community-engaged learning settings, current literature calls for faculty, students, and staff to hone their understandings of social identity, privilege, and power. Understanding these three social forces is key to adequately partnering with community members outside academic institutions (Tryon & Madden, 2019, p. 3). A deep and reflective knowledge of individual social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability, aids in navigating partnerships with community members whose social identities may not align with their own (Tryon & Madden, 2019, p. 8). Ongoing discussions of privilege, or the structural power associated with certain social identities, help to further contextualize the dynamics created by the identities that people bring to campus and community partnerships (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 638). When describing the knowledge and critical commitments required to cultivate high-quality partnerships, Lina D. Dostilio's competency model emphasizes the importance of

- knowledge of self: self-awareness;
- knowledge of local community: history, strengths, assets, agendas, goals;
- consciousness of power relations inherent in partnerships;
- commitment to cultivating authentic relationships with communities (Dostilio, 2017, p. 51).

Although the knowledge and critical commitments outlined above are crucial to community-engaged learning partnerships, this piece puts into question the "knowledge of local community" that scholars and practitioners draw on to inform their partnerships. The knowledge that most people possess regarding the area in which they live is often based in a dominant narrative. Through a more complicated and nuanced understanding of the local, community-engaged scholars and practitioners can better position themselves toward cultivating partnerships that are well equipped to succeed in the COVID-19 reality. In an effort to address specific components of community-engaged learning theory and praxis, the following sections speak to ways in which we must rely on Black and Indigenous conceptions of time and space in order to address White adventure and the perpetuation of the "real world" dichotomy in our work.

Time and White Adventure

Western thought conceptualizes time as linear and rarely accounts for the role of the past in shaping lived experiences of the present, especially the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Linear time also creates distance, and at times discon-

nect, between the wrongs of the past and the present. This disconnect allows those with power—in our context, those within academia—to act as neutral observers of the communities outside the institution, rather than as actors inextricably tied to the complex histories between institutions and communities (Smith, 1999, p. 43). If left unchecked, an adherence to linear time structures promotes what Smith (1999, p. 78) and hooks (2003, p. 34), among others, refer to as White adventure. The concept, or better yet, practice, of White adventure is discussed at length within decolonial theory, but for our purposes, *White adventure* refers to the positioning of community partners as an unknown other to be analyzed and briefly "experienced" by faculty, staff, and students within academia.

The practice of White adventure speaks to a prominent critique of community-engaged learning which argues that this pedagogical approach facilitates privileged voyeurism of the "other." bell hooks, an educator dedicated to what she refers to as democratic education, describes White adventure as an entry point that provides "them [White people/academics] with the necessary tools to continue their race-based dominance" (hooks, 2003, p. 33). The deliberately extractive process that hooks described still takes place in the present day. But more often than not, White adventure is less explicit, but still must be addressed within the field of community-engaged learning in order to move toward a sustainable future for the field.

Some manifestations of community-engaged learning and research may not explicitly create a dichotomy between the White adventurer intellectual and the community "other." More subtle instances of White adventurism within community engagement exist in the use of language like "the field" to refer to spaces outside the walls of the institution. Another example is the conception of the institution's location as a laboratory in which to examine theory learned in coursework.

The issue of the adventurer is more than problematic semantics. Addressing White adventure in community-engaged learning requires a shift in how scholars and practitioners teach students (as well as themselves) to conceptualize the connections between time and space. Community-engaged scholars and practitioners must take into consideration the "bodies, territories, beliefs, and values that have been travelled *through*" when collaborating with community partners (Smith, 1999, p. 81). What assumptions are you bringing to this collaboration? How much do you know about those you are working with, outside the dominant narrative about that community? These questions position scholars and practitioners to disentangle linear understandings of time and White adventure, and prepare us to address one of the largest barriers in our field, the "real world" dichotomy.

Space and Deconstructing the "Real World" Dichotomy

The financial impact of COVID-19 is pushing higher education institutions to prepare students for the "real world," a space touted as somehow distinct from the educational setting, as if the majority of people tied to these institutions do not begin and end their days outside the reach of campus. In an effort to prepare their students, colleges and universities are pouring funds into high-impact practices, community-engaged learning included, that are touted as strategies by which students can "reap the full benefits—economic, civic, and personal—of their studies in college" (Schneider, 2008, p. 1). The rhetorical separation between the institution and what lies outside its walls may be due in part to the benefits of the dichotomy to the goals of the corporate education model. This structure seeks to educate students to become successful employees, who can later be called upon to donate to the college or university, largesse that is needed now more than ever given present significant financial losses.

The "real world" dichotomy also aligns with Smith's understanding of controlled space, which encompasses three main areas: the line, center, and outside. The line establishes boundaries of space, the center describes orientation to the power structure, and the outside encompasses those who are in "an oppositional relation to the colonial centre" (Smith, 1999, p. 53). The line within a community-engaged learning context can be understood as the literal boundary of campus. The rhetorical separation between the campus and the "real world" does students a disservice as they prepare to leave their institutions and depart from the "center."

Framing the institution as a practice space prior to entering the real world prevents students from making clear and informed

connections between what they learn in the classroom and what they experience every day. At its core, community-engaged learning and research seeks to break "through the false construction of the corporate university as set apart from real life and seeks to re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, our real life" (hooks, 2003, p. 41). Community-engaged scholars and practitioners can dismantle the separation of campus and community by sharing "the knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite" (hooks, 2003, p. 41). Although our field may situate itself along the liminal space between the academy and community, we need explicit praxis that grounds Black and Indigenous thought in order to move forward. The following section offers community-engaged learning praxis informed by Black and Indigenous thought in order to challenge our assumptions and prepare scholars and practitioners for the new normal created by the COVID-19 reality.

Praxis in Pursuit of a New Normal

Praxis is often the most difficult question within the field of community-engaged learning, especially when considering engagement with marginalized communities. I have sat in many planning meetings that ended in confusion and disillusionment because the group could not come to a conclusion on how "best" to carry out the various components of our community-engaged learning work. The concern over how to carry out our work is not unwarranted. Many Black and Indigenous scholars affirm the importance of process, given the sordid histories of White researchers entering communities and extracting knowledge without any form of reciprocity. Borrowing again from Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999): "In all community processes—that is, methodology and method—is highly important. In many projects, the process is far more important than the outcome" (p. 130). This may seem discouraging to those who are already conflicted on how to create mutually beneficial partnerships between institutions and marginalized communities. However, Smith continues that "processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate" (p. 130). This focus on process is not meant to discourage, but to ground scholars and practitioners with the knowledge that it is thoughtful action, rather than concerned inaction, that can bring forth a praxis equipped to engage with the realities of our COVID-19 futures.

In the spirit of respectful, healing, and educational process and action, I offer the following pedagogical additions that intentionally structure learning toward interrogating exactly what time and space can begin to mean in community-engaged learning and research.

1. Land Acknowledgments

Institutional land acknowledgments are relatively new to U.S.-based institutions of higher learning. The process of creating a land acknowledgment is often fraught because many institutions rely on their Indigenous faculty, students, and staff to advise or individually craft land acknowledgments on behalf of the institution. This arrangement poses the irony of Indigenous individuals shouldering the labor that allows institutions to sidestep the necessary place-based introspection required to properly honor the lands on which they reside.

Fortunately, land acknowledgments are not inherently flawed; in fact, they are an important sign of respect within many Indigenous cultures. But land acknowledgments require a mindful and reflective approach, rather than the rote memorization that is typical of large bureaucracies like institutions of higher learning. Land acknowledgments are also not a fixed practice. I encourage those I work with to continue to think critically about what it means to occupy land acquired through genocide and built upon through slave labor.

With this knowledge in mind, community-engaged scholars and practitioners are encouraged to begin every project, course, and event with a land acknowledgment that recognizes the past, present, and future stewardship of the land by its Indigenous peoples, as well as naming the labor of enslaved Black people who made that land financially successful for European slave owners and ultimately for the institutions situated on that land. I would emphasize here the importance of recognizing Black and Indigenous connectivity in the past *and* present tense in an attempt to address the continued erasure of these communities' support of the lands on which they live.

2. Teach Black and Indigenous Scholars in Partnership

It is becoming common practice for community-engaged syllabi to begin with a brief discussion of the coursework's connections to Indigenous lands and peoples. Although the intention behind first teaching Indigenous peoples' connection to subject matter aligns well with the growing discussion of Indigeneity within academia, the brevity and distance placed between the "Indigenous unit" and the rest of the subject matter misses important points of knowledge synergy. Community-engaged scholars and practitioners, particularly in the United States, need to think critically about how they can teach Black and Indigenous thinkers together, rather than separately. This is not to imply that Black and Indigenous thought speak directly to one another, but that the intersection of Black and Indigenous thought provides a complex picture of the very communities we seek to engage with in our shared work.

3. Antiracist Workshops

Antiracist workshops can be of immense benefit to community-engaged scholars, practitioners, and students when preparing to work with community partners outside the institution. Though an hour-long workshop cannot address all the intricacies of equitable and reciprocal partnership, such workshops are a good start for learning cultural humility and unlearning harmful assumptions about people outside the academy. In fact, it is common for the majority of antiracist workshops to be "spent simply breaking through the denial that leads many unenlightened white people, as well as people of color, to pretend that racist and white supremacist thought and action are no longer pervasive in our culture" (hooks, 2003, p. 25). This is not to discourage community-engaged learning scholars and practitioners, but to demonstrate, using the experiences of a seasoned educator, just how much work there is to be done on this front.

4. Restorative Justice Healing Circles

Restorative justice healing circles offer an accessible structure for addressing harm and rebuilding community trust. Healing circles, hereafter referred to as "circles," draw on Black and Indigenous community-building processes that focus on emotional, mental, social, and physical wellness (Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, 2020). Circles are grounded around a central fixture complete with items to be held by each individual as they speak aloud to the group. Facilitating a circle requires practice, and it may be in an institution's best interest to hire a trained facilitator, especially when bringing together groups for the first time.

Conclusion

Past and present Black and Indigenous thinkers possess knowledge that can aid the community engagement field in engaging with the COVID-19 reality, a reality characterized by a pandemic and the movement for Black lives, both of which profoundly impact the fundamentals of community-engaged learning: how people come together and learn with one another. By embracing and uplifting Black and Indigenous knowledge ways that have long reckoned with pandemic and state violence, the community-engaged learning discipline has the potential to address White adventure and the "real world" dichotomy in an effort to create a new normal for the field that promotes a sustainable and responsive pedagogy for the future.

It is understandable that some community-engaged scholars and practitioners may be unsure how to embed Black and Indigenous thought, as discussed throughout this piece, into their pedagogy. The arguments and praxis outlined in this proposal were created with the intention of aligning with a variety of disciplines, including the hard sciences. Land acknowledgments are a wonderful place to begin for those who are unsure of what steps to take. I also encourage community-engaged scholars and practitioners who question the applicability of the points outlined here to research Black and Indigenous scholars and practitioners within their own fields and reflect on how these individuals frame their respective work.

Future research and paired reflection on the need for Black and Indigenous thought in community-engaged learning and research has the opportunity to extend the discussion outside the United States. For example, there is a burgeoning amount of community-engaged scholarship coming out of Caribbean studies, from institutions such as the University of the West Indies, that brings together Afro-Indigenous populations to discuss myriad topics, including,

but not limited to, the complexities of possessing both Black/African and Indigenous identities.

It would be unfair to overlook the select community-engaged scholars, practitioners, and institutions already embedding Black and Indigenous knowledge ways into their pedagogy. The University of Toronto is a prime example of an institution that intentionally brings together Black and Indigenous thought in their community-engaged coursework. But the teaching of these forms of knowledge cannot remain in the minority. The continued broad omission of Black and Indigenous conceptions of time and space within the community engagement discipline will only limit the future growth of the field as it enters into a reality in which the fraught and interconnected histories of the communities we work alongside are laid bare.

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