JOINED UP SERVICE LEARNING: WHEN HIGH SCHOOL AND GRADUATE STUDENTS COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY

Thomas A. Bryer
University of Central Florida

INTRODUCTION

Social change and consciousness rising can be achieved through research (e.g., Cahill 2004; Siplon, 1999; Sloane et al. 2003) and teaching (Freire, 2010, 2011; Nickels, Rowland, & Fadase, 2011). When systematically integrated, research and teaching activities can achieve these aims while empowering students, which can have long-lasting impact on community and the capacity of communities to achieve their own change. Lessons learned from these activities can provide opportunities for partnership between public schools, institutions of higher learning, local governments, and civic organizations.

This paper presents an innovative and unique approach to service learning and participatory action research (PAR), intended to empower participating high school and graduate students in order to strengthen community institutions and quality of life of those living and working within communities. Grounded in the theories of service learning and the civic obligations of higher education institutions (e.g., Boyte & Kari, 2000; Bryer, 2011; Cahill, 2004; D'Agostino, 2008; Dewey, 1916), the approach is defined as "joined up service learning." As part of a class, graduate students from multiple disciplines partnered with high school students from an underserved and low performing community to assess community needs and inform the development of a wrap-around service community school.

In Spring 2010, graduate students in a course on Cross-Sectoral Governance were charged with conducting a community needs assessment to inform the development of a community school that was scheduled to replace an existing low performing high school. At the request of school officials, the service learning project and process were re-designed so that International Baccalaureate (IB) high school students could partner with graduate students to collect data through interviews and focus groups, analyze the data, and craft recommendations for the school and community. Teams of graduate and high school students conducted focus groups with other high school students, teachers, faith leaders, school officials, parents, and other stakeholders, and they later developed a final report with recommendations. Both graduate and high school students kept a reflection journal, with prompts provided by the graduate school instructor. These journals are analyzed to determine learning and other outcomes associated with the project, following the technique used by Bryer (2011). The final student report is available online at: http://tinyurl.com/EvansReport.

The paper describes the role of students, the role of the graduate school and high school instructors, and the partnership requirements between the instructor and high school officials and teachers. The design, process, and outcomes for graduate students, high school students, and the community are presented. Recommendations for replicating or evolving this model are suggested. An overall complex undertaking, the effort is deemed worthy of the time investment. However, lessons learned suggest how future similar efforts can be implemented. To begin, a review of theory and practice of service learning at both the high school and graduate level is presented.

Empowering Students through Service Learning and Participatory Action Research

Empowerment of students is not a simple task; the traditional teacher-student model of learning is unidirectional, providing substantial power to the teacher to shape the values, ideas, and future of students. At its worst, the traditional model allows for the perpetuation of the status quo, which may serve to disempower students by preventing their questioning their identity, social standing, or the values of the society in which they reside. Freire (2011) points us to these possibilities in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Shor suggests similar worst case scenarios in his work on classroom democratization (1996). At its best, the traditional model may provide the tools for critical thinking and reflection but stop short of allowing students to use those tools for any kind of community or societal change process. Thus, there is a need for techniques and social technologies for empowering students and thus empowering communities to achieve change. This kind of empowerment can be achieved through an integrated service learning and participatory action research strategy.

Participatory action research offers young people a learning experience unlike typical classroom learning because PAR necessarily includes students' input and perspectives (Cahill, 2004) and is a particularly suitable research strategy for investigating issues of consequence to young people (Cahill, 2007). Cahill (2007) highlights a multitude of benefits that flow from engaging young people in PAR. Those benefits include equalizing the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched by conducting research "*with*, rather than *on* participants" (p. 301) and empowering youth with a sense of self-determination about the future of their communities. Moreover, young people can readily unmask issues that

present challenges in the community. Cahill (2007) elaborates by suggesting that young peoples' "challenges in achieving 'success' implicitly expose the failures of our society" (p. 298).

Service learning has also been shown to have benefits for both high school and college students (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004) suggest outcomes can vary according to objectives; they can be fully applied or skill-building, or transformational in the values held by students. Desired outcomes are more likely in cases where reflection is highly structured (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). Billing, Root, and Jesse (2005) found similar results, thus indicating that design and strategic implementation is vital to achieving desired instrumental or normative outcomes.

It is thus incumbent upon institutions of higher learning to engage in partnerships that allow for strategically implemented service learning for social change to occur. Recognizing this fundamental democratic mission of colleges and universities is particularly necessary in the current political climate, where all manner of government funded enterprises are being challenged for their job-creating benefits, or job-creating burdens. For instance, Florida Governor Rick Scott now infamously chastised anthropology as a worthwhile area of study, casting it as a field that does not fill or create jobs; he followed this with requests to state universities for detailed data on job placement from across disciplines. If we accept that a university or college education prepares not only good employees but strong and effective citizens, then we must engage with models of teaching and learning that permit student empowerment and facilitate social change. Such democratic responsibilities are well documented and expressed in previous literature (e.g. Boyte & Kari, 2000; Bryer, 2011; Dewey, 1916).

APPLYING THE MODEL

This project was carried out over the course of approximately three months by twenty-five graduate students enrolled in the Cross-Sectoral Governance course who worked with eighteen high school students in the IB program at Evans High School, located in the Orange County, Florida neighborhood of Pine Hills. The graduate course is an elective course for the Masters in Public Administration and Masters in Nonprofit Management programs, and it is a required core course for the Masters in Urban and Regional Planning and the graduate certificate in Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Students from each of these disciplines were represented in the class during the semester discussed herein.

The rationales for the service learning effort were three of the four outlined by Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004): (1) community service, (2) moral, (3) instrumental. The project was intended to provide a benefit to the community, discussed below; it was intended to encourage active reflection by graduate and high school students regarding their role in community and society; last, it was intended to develop research and communication skills of student.

Context

The Pine Hills population includes characteristics of low-to-very low income, limited educational achievement, steady population growth, and a recent rise in single-parent households (Pine Hills Business Redevelopment Task Force, 2010). Core demographics of the community include (p ii):

> • Population of approximately 70,500 across 24,300 households, with a 6% growth expected by 2015.

- Unemployment approximately 10.5%.

- 55% of residents employed in retail, accommodation/food services, healthcare, construction, and finance, insurance and real estate.

- Median household income $40,013; 43% of households earned less than $35,000

Evans High School serves the Pine Hills community. Between 2004 and 2010, the school received grades of "F" three times and "D" four times. The graduation rate at the school in 2009-2010 was 79.4%, which represented a 5.4% positive change from the previous year, and an even more significant improvement from 2006-2007 (49%) and 2007-2008 (66%). The graduation rate is slightly above the District and State average of 79%. Recent FCAT scores reveal an achievement gap across certain demographics. In the subject of reading, 20% of ninth graders scored three or better in 2010. A score of three indicates that the student demonstrated only partial mastery of the test content. Broken down, white students scored better than black students by twenty percentage points and better than Hispanic students by ten percentage points; male and female students achieved about equally; free or reduced lunch students performed less well than those students not on free or reduced lunch by a factor of ten percentage points.
Given these conditions, both in the school and the surrounding community, leaders from multiple sectors came together to craft a plan to build a new school campus, modeled as a wrap-around service community school. Leaders came from the school district, the nonprofit Children's Home Society, the College of Health and Public Affairs at the University of Central Florida (UCF), the

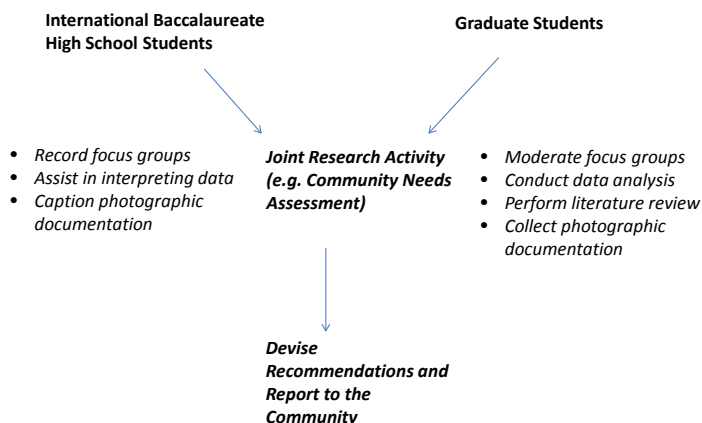College of Education at UCF, and other partners, including a funding partnership with J. P. Morgan Chase Bank.

    A community school is "a place, a set of partnerships, and a strategy for building communities where learning happens" (Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, & Pearson, 2010, p. 3). Some of the strategies aimed at building such communities are resource sharing between school faculty, parents and community partners, the integration of community-based learning into the school curriculum, expanded networks of adult support, and preventive health and social services. The desired results are "more successful students, families, school, and communities" (Blank, et al., 2010, p. 4) indicated by improvement in areas such as student aspirations, community strength, student attendance and graduation rates, and overall student grades.

"Joined Up" Service Learning Partnership Structure

    In order to determine the student, family, and community needs the community school might address in Pine Hills, the leading partners engaged with a faculty member at the University of Central Florida to develop a service learning project that would assess need and make recommendations for the development of the school. Figure 1 presents the functional structure of the partnership between students. The core activity was for graduate and high school student researchers to conduct focus groups with various stakeholder groups across sectors within the Pine Hills community—students, parents, teachers, faith organizations, and members of the community. Pairing the IB students with graduate students accomplished several goals including but not limited to (1) the IB students provided local knowledge of the school and community to the UCF graduate students, (2) the IB students helped the UCF graduate students develop a short-term trust

relationship with the focus group participants, (3) research provided a learning opportunity for both the IB students as well as the UCF graduate students.

Figure 1: Structure of the Partnership

International Baccalaureate High School Students

Graduate Students

- *Record focus groups*
- *Assist in interpreting data*
- *Caption photographic documentation*

Joint Research Activity (e.g. Community Needs Assessment)

- *Moderate focus groups*
- *Conduct data analysis*
- *Perform literature review*
- *Collect photographic documentation*

Devise Recommendations and Report to the Community

The purpose of these focus groups was to address the following questions in connection with understanding the needs of the community with respect to the new community school.

• What factors outside of school time facilitate and/or hinder student success in school?

• What facility and human resources exist for occupying students outside of school time?

- How does the faith community in Pine Hills
perceive their role in relation to youth educational
achievement?

- What does the community want out of a
community school?

- How are parents of Evans students currently
utilizing school resources to engage with their
child's learning?

At each focus group, one graduate student researcher
served as a moderator, and at least one high school student
researcher served as a recorder or note-taker. The
moderator was charged with asking the questions to the
stakeholder group. The recorder was charged with
recording the participants' responses to the questions posed
by the moderator, thereby creating a record of the focus
groups' answers. The answers were collected from the
recorders and compiled by the UCF graduate student
researchers.

Shortly after concluding the focus groups, the IB
student researchers were asked to help formulate
recommendations based on observations from the various
focus groups. Those recommendations are encompassed in
the final section of the report (web URL provided
previously) together with the recommendations offered by
the graduate student researchers.

In addition to the focus groups, graduate student
researchers were charged with conducting a literature
review on topics of concern in developing the future
community school. Specifically, students reviewed
available literature on the following subjects: community
school models, parental engagement in education, and faith
organization-school partnerships. The reviews are also
contained in the final report.

Implementing the "Joined Up" Model

Designing the "joined up" model was approached with some trepidation, given the complex logistics that would need to be worked out. However, with careful planning and a trusting relationship across partnering organizations, the model was implemented with no perceptible flaw. Four topics are addressed here: logistics management of the partnership, pedagogical management of the partnership, the role of the graduate student faculty member, and the role of the high school teacher whose students were signed up to work on the project.

Logistics Management. The primary logistical concerns for the project included the scheduling of focus groups, ensuring background check clearance for graduate students, addressing liability concerns if high school students are off-campus for research, and managing expectation for community members and partners. With focus groups as the core activity, the biggest challenge was to schedule focus groups with diverse stakeholders—high school students, teachers, community members, faith organization leaders, parents—at a time and location that was convenient for both the graduate students, who would be driving from outside the community, and high school students, who would have limited and constrained times during the school day or after school. Ultimately, most focus groups were convened during the school day or immediately after on the high school campus, with one significant exception. The first effort to convene parents for a focus group was coordinated with a regularly scheduled Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) meeting; however, as was typical for these meetings, only four parents showed up. Thus, a second attempt was initiated in partnership with faith organizations in the community to hold a parental focus group at a central church location in

the evening. For this group, high school students did not participate.

Background checks were necessary for participating graduate students, as they would be on the high school campus and directly interacting with students. Coordination with the school district allowed the background checks to be completed with little delay. From a design perspective, alternative assignments for graduate students were needed in the event that any graduate student failed the background screening. The literature review assignments provided this alternative.

Liability concerns needed to be addressed in the event that high school students traveled off their campus to participate in focus groups or some other activity. Though in final implementation this was not an issue, the issue was addressed by ensuring that school personnel would use a school mini-van to transport students as necessary, rather than having graduate students drive them. This plan, though not needed in implementation, remains in place for future iterations of the project.

Lastly, community members and partners required a clear statement of what the final output of this project would be. Importantly, the expectation should not be for a highly polished and comprehensive study and analysis, as it would be student-driven and highly constrained in time and resources available for commitment to the project. For example, the failure to attract parents to the PTSA meeting for a focus group led the graduate faculty member to organize another focus group event with assistance from students in the class, as well as students from another graduate class to meet the labor need. This second event still did not generate ample parental participation. If this had been a funded needs assessment, additional effort would be undertaken to access and assess parental viewpoints; in this case, the effort was ended, and the challenge of engaging parents was taken up as a core area

for graduate and high school students to address in making final recommendations to community school partners.

Pedagogical Management. As previously discussed, service learning has the potential to create learning opportunities that empower students and enable social change. Successful implementation of the effort thus requires structured learning opportunities for both graduate and high school students. For graduate students, the task is more straightforward, as the research is linked to course content delivered on a weekly basis in the classroom. Figure 2 lists the course objectives, including service learning objectives.

Figure 2: Graduate Class Objectives

Academic and Scholarly Objectives:

- Analyze the size, trends, nature, structure, and constraints of the public, for-profit, and nonprofit sectors.
- Evaluate the structure, dynamics, and processes of cross-sectoral governance
- Analyze the rationales for cross-sectoral governance arrangements
- Integrate an understanding of historical and theoretical perspectives of intergovernmental relations and cross-sectoral governance
- Evaluate the future of cross-sectoral governance and the system as a whole

Professional Development Objectives:

- Develop governance, consensus building, and conflict resolution tools in inter- and intra- organizational interactions.

Service Learning Objectives:

- Develop a normative orientation towards self and community
- Learn about community—strong community requires active involvement with and of diverse stakeholders
- Learn about citizenship—as professional citizens, we individually and collectively have responsibilities towards the betterment of communities, not only for our own selves and neighborhoods. "Public service is rent for our time here on earth."
- Learn about service and knowledge—With knowledge comes responsibility

For high school students, the service learning objectives were the same, but control over other course content was necessarily limited. The graduate faculty member visited the class three times in the course of the semester: first to introduce the project, second to train students on focus

group protocol and procedure, and third to facilitate discussion with students on the results of the study and generate recommendations.

   Both groups of students were asked to reflect on their experiences; reflection is a core component of service learning, as it requires students to consider the meaning and implications of their work both in their lives and in the context of their course work. The method for reflection was an individually written journal; this is a preferred method as it allows for a record to be kept of student reflections, thus permitting analysis afterwards in efforts to assess learning outcomes and other process issues (Bryer, 2011). Figure 3 shows the reflection questions for the high school students; figure 4 shows the reflection questions for the graduate students. Each group of students was asked to respond to reflection prompts three times during the semester: once before the start of the project, once while the project was in process, and once at the conclusion of the project. High school students completed their journals in paper notebooks provided by the graduate faculty member; graduate students completed their journals electronically.

   Role of the Graduate and High School Faculty. The implementation of "joined up" service learning requires intensive commitment on the part of both graduate and high school faculty. Three tasks for the graduate faculty are common with other large-scale service learning projects: development of a research protocol, facilitation of reflection, and facilitation of a joint writing process to develop a final report with recommendations (Bryer, 2011). Perhaps the most complex component of the process is the writing of the final report. With students assigned to different "tasks" (e.g. focus groups with students, focus groups with parents, etc., and literature review), the graduate instructor asks for a volunteer from each group to serve on a writing team. It is this volunteer team that writes the final report and draft recommendations, facilitated in

their discussion by the instructor. The draft recommendations are then presented to the rest of the students and edited as necessary. All students must be willing to give up a little control over the final written report, and thus a portion of their course grade, in order for this process to occur in a timely fashion.

Figure 3: High School Student Reflection Prompts

Part 1

- What are your expectations for this semester's service learning project?
- What do you personally hope to contribute to the project?

Part 2

- How have your expectations regarding this project changed as you have worked as a recorder during focus groups?
- How would you describe your experience working as a recorder during the focus groups? Have you encountered any particular challenges?
- What have you learned by working with graduate students at UCF?

Part 3

- Based on your experience working on the community needs assessment project, do you feel you have the power to shape the future of Evans Community School? If so, explain why you feel you have the power. If not, explain why you feel you do not have that power?
- What have you learned about the process of conducting research? Do you have an interest in working on future research projects that will allow you to conduct research?
- You had a limited opportunity to interact with UCF graduate students. Describe how you might like to interact with UCF graduate students as part of your school work in the future.

Figure 4: Graduate Student Reflection Prompts

Part 1

- What are your expectations for this semester's service learning project?
- What do you personally hope to contribute to the project?
- How do you anticipate being able to apply lessons and theories learned in class to the service learning project?

Part 2

- How have your expectations regarding this project changed as you have read more about networks, partnerships, and collaboration?
- Based on your readings and class lecture notes regarding network structure and management, what barriers do you foresee in creating a sustainable community school that successfully engages the cross-section of stakeholders?
- You may have had some opportunity to work with students at Evans High School during the focus group process. What have you learned from them, or what observations do you have about their contributions to this project?

Part 3

- What do you feel you have learned in bridging course content with field research?
- What theories and/or tools do you envision as being applicable to the recommendations we are making to Evans High School?
- What do you feel you or the class will be contributing through your work to Evans High School and the Pine Hills community?

Unique to the "joined up" model are the addition of logistics management, and the inclusion of high school students in crafting the final report. The high school faculty member is needed to prepare her students for participation, keep reflection journals, and facilitate the journaling process. She also must disrupt her other course plans to accommodate the instructional needs of the graduate faculty.

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY: METHOD

Following the method employed by Bryer (2011), student reflection journals are content coded to assess learning outcomes. This analysis is particularly focused on the moral rationale described by Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004), which is focused on the development of

student empowerment and orientation towards an active role in the community. The other rationales pursued in the project—community service and instrumental—are not assessed here. To analyze the journals the author and a volunteer not involved with the project read through all journals, coding statements as whole sentences and/or paragraphs related to student empowerment and the development of a role orientation in the community. Coders grouped statements independently into categories based on similar meaning, after which time the coders met to discuss the categories created. A final set of categories and statements were defined through consensus, and coders independently re-coded all statements into the agreed upon categories. The final inter-coder agreement was 96%; the statements presented herein are based on the coding of the author.

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY: FINDINGS

Graduate students entered the project with great anticipation for what they could achieve; high school students were more measured in their approach. By the end of the project, graduate students were generally up-beat on the potential of their work to inform decision-making; high school students were mixed in the extent to which they felt they had the power to affect positive change in their school. All students recognized the unique characteristics of the service learning/PAR project and several students desired more intensive interaction with their research partners (i.e. more intensive interaction between high school and graduate students). Overall, a conclusion is that this "joined up" model of service learning, while logistically challenging, can be effective for giving voice to those who generally do not perceive themselves to have such power; however, for the high school students who experience their

lives continually subjugated by the conditions of their neighborhood and family life, the continued lack of felt power suggests the need for on-going collaborative partnerships such as this. To do otherwise (i.e. one-time research partnership, followed by departure by the university) would perhaps be more damaging to the students' efficacy. Follows are more detailed findings from the student journals.

Uniqueness of the Service Learning/PAR Experience. This was a fully unique experience for all parties involved. Graduate students who had prior opportunities for service learning projects were in a position to assess the difference, and some of them offered their conclusions. "I have done service-learning projects in previous classes before, but the Evans High School focus groups were different because it actually allowed me (and my peers) to interact with the individuals that would be affected directly by the outcome of our research." Similarly, another student offered that "not all of [my prior service learning courses] have students civically engage in the activities such as finding the problems a particular community faces, and addressing those problems through offering the best alternative and practice."

The most unique part of this project, of course, was the "joined up" partnership between graduate and high school students. Graduate students seemed to learn more from the high school students than vice versa; indeed, the high school students lamented a lack of overall interaction. Those high school students who did respond positively to the interaction, they discussed how they observed professionalism, but they longed for more of a mentoring relationship.

Graduate students on the other hand were split between gaining inspiration from the high school students and, like the high school students, finding the interactions to be limiting. On a practical note, one graduate student

considered how "working with the students was very enlightening because it showed me their dynamics as a student and what they wish to see in a future school." Another student wrote that the "collaborations with the students surpassed my expectations; the students were very interactive during the focus groups and offered innovative ideas." This student continued: "The [high school] students are great students that really want to see their school become a safe, fun, and productive learning environment for them." Similarly, one graduate student noted the commitment and empowerment of the high school students: "This project isn't something that the students are just letting happen to their school they want to be a part of the transition. The students have actually made me more excited about this project." One student summarized this positive outlook: "I feel that working with them was inspiring and gave me hope that this project would be a success."

Still other students saw the unique partnership as a mentoring or even parental relationship. One graduate student wrote that he sees a need to ensure the "unheard" have a voice. Another wrote: "I hope that through the class interaction with the students and community we have shown them that they do have a voice and the leaders of Evans Community School want to hear what they have to say." In the parental frame, one graduate student stated that "as college student and faculty interacting with students, we serve as role models for them and encourage them that higher education is a possibility." More directly, another student wrote that "what's important is that we invest in those children, not only funds, but leadership that guides them to college, while more emphasis is placed on high school students being prepared for college overall." Though some of the graduate students readily adopted this mentoring role, it was not designed as such and was not perceived as such by the high school students.

Anticipatory Contributions. High school students were more muted in what they thought they could contribute, as they never had this kind of prior experience. For those who did state some kind of anticipation, the comments reflected a strong desire to see their community improve. For instance: "I personally just hope to contribute some ideas that might benefit my community and make Pine Hill a better place for everyone." Another offered: "My expectation for this project is to help Evans High get a better name and not be a School that people look down to."

Graduate students saw their role in less personal terms but, consistent with the graduate professional degree they were seeking, perceived themselves as playing a small part in a larger narrative of change. One student summed it up with the parable of the ant: "In short, the interest in and commitment to the high ideals here, belief and trust I have, sharing the same goals and responsibilities with other stakeholder will help me at least pour a bucket [of] water to extinguish this societal fire. Perhaps, I will not be able to see the outcomes; however, my side will be determined to the public good as a deliberative ant said. When sarcastically asked an ant, it said that I may not be able to extinguish the fire with the water I carry in my mouth; however, my side is determined. This is enough for me." More straightforward, a student offered that he "hopes to be able to say that I assisted in putting together a project which will improve the community of Pine Hills." Others spoke more broadly about the opportunity to "give back to the community."

In recognizing their role as agents, however minor, of change, students recognized the unique opportunity to assist those who are in need. "I believe it is a wonderful idea that we are joining privilege[d] students with student that are misfortunate. This connection allows students to actually become involve[d] with the external disadvantages of other[s] rather than to just read about it." Another

offered: "My background is extremely different than those that live in the Pine Hills area, and it will be interesting to gain insight of how I can reach out more and help my community." Recognizing these two worlds, another student wrote how he wished to "get their voice heard through ethical research, dedication to presenting accurate information, and working with group members and classmates to obtain the best result possible." Another student hoped to serve as a "catalyst for younger people to be actively engaged citizens."

Overall, across high school and graduate students, there was palpable desire to engage with the project and to pursue change in the community. The differences were in intensity and personalization; high school students, with the lived experience in the community, were more intent on pursuing an improvement in their own lot in life.

Empowerment and Achievement. Self-empowerment can be realized through observable achievement. As one graduate student suggested: "Engaging ourselves in field work brings us a sense of fulfillment, as we can see first-hand the results of our labor, class lectures, readings, and theories discussed." Students reflected on some of what they think they achieved. "I think we contributed also with our approach to the data collected. We worked hard to encourage participation from each stakeholder, including students, teachers, administrators, and community, faith and business leaders of the Pine Hills area." Another graduate student reflected on his work and the link to an improvement in the community: "I have through my work contributed to Evans High School and the Pine Hill community in that through the focus groups I helped facilitate communication between stakeholders, brought my unique understanding of the course content I learned, and have exhibited a professional demeanor that show-cased UCF in a good light—as did we all!"

Other students reflected on their own self-fulfillment and hope for desired change. For instance, a graduate student offered that he "continues to remain optimistic that our project can build knowledge and provide feedback that may prove valuable to the Pine Hills community." Another related that he is "so much happy and consider myself lucky since I have been involved in this public participation process, feeling and hoping wholeheartedly that a more stable, secure, and prosperous neighborhood in Pine Hills will be a hub for our children, our future." When asked if they felt empowered, high school students also responded affirmatively: "I think I do because if I make good grades I can help Evans better its name. To let people know that Evans kids are smart. I feel that I can change that." Another offered simply that "I do because I'm shaping the future of my school."

Despite these general feelings of optimism and empowerment, both graduate and high school students recognized through their observations or their own self-awareness that change is challenging. The graduate students recognized the challenges ahead based on their learning in the course. "My optimism has had a glimpse of reality after learning so much about the difficulties encountered in a cross-sectoral effort. I understand that the road to success will be hard and filled with mishaps." Another stated: "Collaboration across sectors is difficult. It's tempting to think of only yourself and the agency you may represent. As if individual internal struggles weren't enough, one has to take into consideration that everyone involved in collaboration has their own beliefs and doubts as to whether or not they are working for the right cause." The high school students who raised concern were more introspective, given their personal lived experience in the environment that is the subject of change. "Not that I don't think I have the power, but I don't think I would be willing to start a change on my own. It takes time, a dedicated

leader, and others to back you up." This same student, paralleling the graduate student's ant parable, reflected: "I really enjoyed being part of the change that I would like to see."

There were, however, a number of high school students who did not, after the completion of the project, feel empowered to affect change. Though it must be noted that these responses were collected prior to the release and presentation of the final report and recommendations, and one student cited this as the reason for lack of felt power: ". . . because I have not seen the result of us participating." Besides this explanation, students offered a variety of justifications for their feeling.

- *No decision authority*. "I do not feel I have the power to shape Evans because I can sit here and demand a million things, but when I will actually see the effect of that is years from now until I see change. We begged for a new school for years and now we got it because somebody with power somewhere decided it."

- *Lack of passion*. "I feel that I do not have that power. I feel that way because I'm just one little person, and I don't have enough drive and passion for this project."

- *Lack of control*. "I feel that I don't have the power to shape the future of Evans Community School. A lot of people might want to shape it for the better, but it is unknown if we will succeed or not. It all depends if the future students of Evans High keep it on positive and for the best."

- *Lack of support*. I feel that I don't have the power, because I feel people wouldn't cooperate."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION AND ENHANCEMENT

The movement towards empowerment and thus capacity for achieving social change is apparent in the reflections of both high school and graduate students, though perhaps the full potential of the process was not realized. Offered here first are suggestions for enhancing the process to better achieve desired empowerment outcomes; these suggestions are followed by more practical tips for replicating the model elsewhere.

First, future iterations that enhance the model might include structured opportunities for joint deliberation between all participating and high school students. This was a limitation in the model as implemented, as both graduate and high school students expressed a lack of engagement with the other. Such structured opportunities for deliberation can include joint class sessions, with interactive deliberative exercises that require or strongly encourage graduate and high school students to engage in active discussion. For instance, mixed groups of students might be asked to brainstorm a common problem together, or to share the thing they like least or like most about their neighborhood. The goal would be to facilitate a mutual learning about each other, develop trust across groups of students, and share diverse lived experiences.

Second, high school students might be given full control over segments of the data collection process. In the current model, high school students served as recorders/note-takers for focus groups moderated by graduate students. Once the focus group ended, they handed their notes over, and did not follow the full process

until brought back in at the end to provide feedback on recommendations. Giving them full control over a segment of data collection would potentially give them more ownership and felt control over the process. For instance, they might be tasked with administering a short survey to fellow students around their campus, as well as with tabulating the results of the survey.

Third, curriculum can be provided in partnership with a teacher or teachers at the high school to allow participating high school students a basic understanding of the course content being learned by graduate students. This would provide high school students with a connection to the bigger theoretical picture, while, based on the first suggestion, providing graduate students a connection to the bigger experiential picture. Indeed, a set of joint class sessions can accomplish the first and third suggestions.

Last, designing a less logistically challenging process can free the graduate instructor to focus more on pedagogical management and outcomes. The use of focus groups was particularly challenging from a logistical point of view; using alternative data collection methods, such as one-on-one interviews can put the burden of scheduling on the shoulders of graduate students directly. This technique has been used successfully in other large-scale service learning projects (Bryer, 2011).

Practical Tips to Design the "Joined Up" Project

Involving students, particularly those students who are members of the community where the research is being conducted, in PAR through service-learning facilitates pathways to effective collaboration with other community members and increases future capacity of the community to respond to its challenges (Rao, Arcury, & Quandt, 2004; Reardon, 1998). There are critical questions to ask when considering whether to involve students in PAR. The first

consideration concerns the research itself, namely whether the research can accommodate student participation. To answer this inquiry, the ability of the student to understand the demands and goals of the research as well as the likelihood that the student will learn from the experience should be taken into account. The second primary consideration concerns which students are best suited to carry out the research. Students with present or anticipated future ties to the community, capacity to faithfully carry out the research, good communication skills, and commitment to the research make good student-researcher candidates (Rao, Arcury, & Quandt, 2004).

Other considerations are described by Bryer (2011) and include: (1) Are you, as the instructor, willing to invest significant time to the success of the project? Among items requiring time are those outlined by Imperial, Perry, and Katula (2007): make explicit the connection between service activity and learning objectives, facilitate student reflection, maintain faculty commitment, and measure perceptible impacts. (2) Involve your Institutional Review Board in order to ethically and legitimately collect data from your students through reflection journals or other techniques. This is necessary to ensure the larger teaching and learning community can benefit from scholarship on teaching and learning. (3) Develop a clear theoretical framework that guides the overall project. Without such a framework, the cohesiveness of the project might suffer. In this case, the model was based on public participation and stakeholder involvement models for the actual community needs assessment work, and it was based on PAR theories for the design of the service learning and engaged research processes.

Last, the unique character of the "joined up" model requires a strong relationship between high school officials and university officials. That relationship existed in this case; in the absence of such a strong relationship, it might

be best to take a year or so to develop a trusting relationship across parties through smaller projects that meet pedagogical needs of both parties. This relationship building must be part of the time requirement considered by the graduate instructor.

CONCLUSION

The power of partnership is significant. Not only can organizations working together accomplish more than if working separately—the premise of the graduate Cross-Sectoral Governance class—but the individuals participating from each organization can benefit as well. That is certainly the case here, where graduate and high school students made movement towards felt empowerment and the capacity for achieving social change in their communities. Future iterations can build on this model in the ways suggested, or in other ways. The power of this model is reflected in a "thank you" not from one of the high school students, and it is this note that will close the essay:

> Thank you for the opportunity to be part of the community school focus group process. I speak on the behalf of Evans High students when I say we appreciate your efforts to try to make our school not feel like a school, but a home, and for that we are grateful. We know that you do not have to do these things for us, most people don't know us and don't know how great we can be and the things we can do or our talents and hopes and dreams that we [hold]. They don't know what we go through and the pain and struggles we deal with. Evans is my home. I walk these halls and I see my brothers and sisters fall, they fall into the temptations and cruelty of this world. I see how great and stunning they are, things

other people will never see. So on behalf of my
family I say thank you UCF . . . Thank you.

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