

Building Community Capacity through School-Based Service-Learning

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Abstract

This article describes the opportunities and challenges encountered in the service-learning adaptation of an early childhood primary prevention program through the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston Auburn College. In the face of economic and social challenges confronted by many communities, service-learning models are proposed as essential programs for community-based colleges to develop. Recommendations based upon experiences in this collaboration are provided for colleges looking to expand their school-based service-learning programs.

As the U.S. economy struggles and our communities grapple with rising unemployment, increasing rates of poverty, and diminished resources, our colleges and universities strive to remain viable and relevant to the changing needs of modern societies. Particularly our public and community-based educational institutions search for innovative programs to expand their dwindling resources, while fighting an uphill battle of trying to recruit and retain students who face multiple economic challenges. In communities already hard hit by depressed economic times, the current crisis is felt even more dramatically as every level of the educational system, from public elementary through college, strains to meet growing demands. In communities with low educational attainment, these conditions may be even more acute, as jobs in the mills and on the assembly lines become scarcer, and a college degree becomes increasingly necessary to work in our 21st-century economy.

Community school-based service-learning programs provide a reciprocal opportunity for universities and schools alike to build their capacity, prepare future professionals, and develop aspirations in their young people. This article discusses an innovative service-learning model integrated into a school-based counseling program through just such a collaboration of community-based public university and local schools. In the multilevel analysis of this collaborative program's challenges and benefits, we suggest a model of general applicability and provide recommendations for community school-based service-learning programs. We argue that, particularly in communities with low educational attainment such as that described here, and amongst non-traditional college students, child-focused community service-learning programs are powerful means of disrupting cycles of low educational attainment and poverty. Such programs are not only valuable in meeting the changing needs of such communities and colleges, but vital to their long-term sustainability and resilience in the face of this economic

downturn. For just as early intervention programs build resilience and develop assets in the lives of young children, so too do these programs build resilience, foster success, and enhance the resources of the college students participating in the program, as well as in their universities and communities. Viewing the development and expansion of school-based service-learning programs as necessary to the prosperity of our community-based colleges, this article will conclude with recommendations of general applicability with hopes of promoting the proliferation of more such programs.

The Setting: Androscoggin County, Maine

Like many regions in the United States, the central Maine county of Androscoggin, in which the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston Auburn College campus (USM LAC) and the public elementary schools served by its service-learning programs are located, is experiencing financial and social hardship on several levels. Androscoggin County, with a population of approximately 107,000 (Maine Children's Alliance 2009) contains the cities of Lewiston and Auburn, two of Maine's largest and most densely populated cities. Although facing increasingly dire economic conditions of late (the unemployment rate in 2009 has ranged from 8.3 percent to 9.3 percent [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009]), much of the county has been economically challenged for nearly a generation as these former mill towns have striven to redefine their economic base. Children in Androscoggin County are particularly impacted: the rate of child poverty is 21.5 percent and the proportion of children who qualify for food stamps is 29 percent (Maine Children's Alliance 2009). Local schools also feel the ramifications of these challenges on several planes, as 19 percent of Androscoggin's K-12 students are classified as having a disability requiring special education attention and 46.1 percent qualify for free or reduced-fare school lunch (Maine Children's Alliance 2009). Although spending on public elementary education in Maine is relatively high as compared with national averages, recent state budget crises have led to multiple school consolidations, staffing cuts, and greater restriction of school resources as the state wrestles with balancing its budget and adapting to projected lower tax revenues (Maine State Legislature 2008). In addition to this bleak financial picture, educational attainment in Androscoggin County has been quite low for some time: only 16 percent of working-age adults have a college degree and only 25 percent have a postsecondary degree of any kind (Phillips and Macri 2008).

In response to community awareness about low educational attainment in the region, the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston Auburn College campus was founded in 1988, and has developed to meet the needs of its community and region. Lewiston-Auburn College is one of three campuses comprising USM, a regional comprehensive public university providing undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. Situated in Lewiston, the campus serves approximately 1,250 students, all commuters. In addition to being "non-traditional" in age (average age is thirty), 75 percent of USM LAC students are female, most are first-generation college students, and many are also single parents. Nearly all USM LAC students are economically challenged (over 90 percent receive financial assistance to attend school) and routinely juggle college

classes, employment, and family obligations. Consequently, it is paramount to the LAC mission that the curriculum be relevant to the lives of its students and to their needs in developing skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the community.

The Primary Project

In the context of this multifaceted community, USM LAC integrates Social and Behavioral Science students, through the Primary Project, as Child Associates. The Primary Project (formerly the Primary Mental Health Project) is a preventive mental health program targeting children in grades kindergarten through third grade at-risk of educational failure. Since its initiation in 1957, the Primary Project has emphasized screening and selection of young children, training and intervention using non-directive counseling techniques, and the use of paraprofessionals supervised by school-based mental health professionals. The success of the project is predicated on the theory that children's social, emotional, and learning competencies are interwoven; that intervening early produces best results; and that non-directive play enables children to improve these competencies and make better use of the existing educational environment. A complete description of the Primary Project is found in Johnson, Pedro-Carroll, and Demanchick (2005) and in Johnson (2002).

Implementing the Primary Project as Service-Learning

A service-learning approach is well suited to the goals of the Primary Project. In the intervention model described here, the service-learning course entitled "Healthy Learners" is used as a vehicle to train and supervise USM LAC students as Child Associates. As non-traditional students, the life experiences of those enrolled in USM LAC service-learning courses complement the intervention: the Primary Project encourages training Child Associates who are mature and compassionate (Johnson 2002). The student body of the college provides a large number of students meeting these recommendations because they frequently enroll with concurrent family responsibilities, including the care of young children and employment involving young children.

The participation in the service-learning Healthy Learners course to accompany the Primary Project interventions also creates major administrative differences. The course includes (1) traditional scholarship, classroom discussion, and assignments such as written papers or other graded assessments; (2) service to public elementary schools (similar to a clinical training internship); (3) classroom time dedicated to regular group/peer supervision, program coordination, treatment confidentiality, and child abuse and neglect reporting; and (4) a deliberate effort to encourage student reflection, integrating the practical service efforts and related scholarship. Scholarly readings and discussions in child-centered play and psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Axline 1947, 1993; Rogers 1951; Schlesenger 2003; Winnicot 1971) are integrated into written assignments incorporating session notes and child observations.

Ordinarily, the Primary Project is managed entirely by administrators and school counselors within the schools served. However, with the inclusion of LAC students, the university has assumed primary responsibility for project coordination, training, and supervision. In schools where the university student Child Associates are working, the service-learning class instructor provides direction for program evaluation, including distribution of evaluation forms, screening and selection of children to be included in the project, and evaluation of children's progress through the school year. In addition, the instructor establishes Child Associate site placement through initial scheduling and bears primary responsibility for supervision and the fidelity of the intervention.

The most significant organizational change in implementing the Primary Project as a service-learning model comes about because of the low number of children served per university Child Associate. A part-time Child Associate who is a paraprofessional employee of the school may see as many as 25 to 30 children each year (Johnson, Pedro-Carroll, and Demanchick 2005). The USM-LAC service-learning class provides the intervention to 30 or 40 children using 12 to 15 students. Thus, the organizational structure, especially as it relates to managing the clinical supervision, becomes more complicated. In addition, the entire group of university Child Associates changes each term, requiring that all training and procedures involved in maintaining the program (orientation, training, background checks and references, and site placement) be thoroughly addressed and updated each time. Finally, as the university students are not necessarily involved in the elementary schools except to see project children, they are less familiar with school personnel, policies, and procedures. Thus, the school counselors need to facilitate communication to a greater degree (for instance between the teacher or parent and Child Associate) than in a more typical implementation of the Primary Project.

In the service-learning model, supervision of Child Associates occurs through multiple methods: on the public school site with the school counselor, in the group setting of the classroom, and individually with the instructor as needed. School counselors remain responsible for on-site supervision, but the focus of this supervision changes to consist of matters of immediate practical importance and child progress rather than program fidelity. Supervision also occurs in a group setting in the university classroom. Approximately half of each class is spent in group supervision with the course instructor, who is a doctoral-level clinical psychologist. The remaining half of the class is devoted to scholarship and project organization. The focus of supervision in class is on program fidelity and on incorporating child counseling theory into the students' experiences with children. School counselors are invited into the course at any time to encourage a diversity of clinical viewpoints and to increase the opportunities for communication with child associates. To some extent, the additional supervision time in class ensures adequate supervision of students as scheduling difficulties arise between the school counselors and university Child Associates. This challenge to supervision occurs because the students are typically unavailable in the schools except close to the time when providing the intervention. Frequently, school

space limitations exaggerate this effect as students may use a counselor's office on a day when the counselor is out of the office.

In ordinary implementation, the Primary Project costs approximately \$400 per child served per year (D. Johnson, Children's Institute, personal communication, September 20, 2004). This amount is calculated from estimates of the cost of training, the cost of evaluation instruments, and the cost of paraprofessionals' time. Through the service-learning course, students provide the intervention at no financial cost to the public school, so the estimated cost per child served can decrease to approximately \$10 per child, equivalent to the expense of the evaluation instruments. Tuition paid by university students covers course instructor time. Other expenses, such as site use, counselor supervision time, and toys are provided in-kind by the elementary schools.

Analysis of the Collaborative Approach

The unique service-learning application of the Primary Project reaps fruitful information on several levels regarding the assets and challenges of utilizing university students as Child Associates. Through analysis of these qualitative findings we also derive lessons which can be applied to other similar community school-based service-learning programs. In fact, placing students in schools is a regular practice for many social and behavioral science, human service, and education programs, as well as for many clinical and mental health professional preparation programs. For instance, the use of college students as positive adult mentors, particularly in the lives of at-risk youth, is a longstanding tradition in many colleges, especially those housed in urban environments (Moskowitz et al. 2006). In addition, many universities build on their collaborative partnerships with community schools to train their future professionals and serve their communities through the provision of these often gifted, energetic students. Similarities between the Healthy Learners program assets and challenges and those of other school-based service-learning programs can provide useful guidance in the establishment, evaluation, and enhancement of other, similar programs.

The lessons derived from analysis of the service-learning integration model are discussed on four levels, from focus on the impact of the program on the individual college students, through the macro-level assessment of this community engagement program on the communities themselves. (1) Our discussion begins with college student benefits and challenges from the service-learning experience, including the intricacies of supervision in the Healthy Learners course. (2) We then graduate the level of analysis as we explore the unique hybrid role of the college student placed in the school and consider how the individual and institutional levels overlap with the unique complexities derived from inter-institutional collaboration. (3) At the level of institutional analysis, we discuss the amplification of resources afforded by the collaboration, as well as the complications presented. (4) To complete the circle, we end the discussion with an analysis of the impact of the collaborative work on the children served by the program and, through these children, the more global impact on their community.

Value of the Service-learning Model to College Students

The service-learning model of the Primary Project engenders a pervasive impact through the experiences of college students who participate as Child Associates in the program. Service-learning has been shown to be effective in enhancing undergraduate and graduate education in fields related to child development and counseling. Strage (2004) found that advanced course performance was more prevalent among students who first completed an introductory child development course with a service-learning component than among students who had no such component. Blieszner and Artale (2001) distributed precourse and postcourse questionnaires to 217 students enrolled in both traditional courses and service-learning courses in human development, and found that students enrolled in service-learning courses felt they better understood developmental concepts and had clearer ideas concerning future career choices. In graduate counselor education, Barbee, Scherer, and Combs (2003) found higher self-efficacy and lower anxiety in service-learning students.

In our experience with college students whose learning styles are such that they are less approachable using traditional methods, the opportunity to integrate applied experience with text and theory can lead to mastery of concepts and skills that previously were not well comprehended. This experience is consistent with documented effects of service-learning on students in both secondary and postsecondary education (Laursen 2003; Prentice and Garcia 2000). This appeal to differential learning styles has been shown particularly for many “non-traditional” and first-generation college students (Jacoby 2000), as are so many of the students at USM LAC.

USM LAC students enrolled in this service-learning course have consistently demonstrated high quality service and successful completion of learning objectives, have rated the course with high marks, and have shown high levels of commitment. In the winter and spring of 2008 an unusual number of school days were cancelled due to inclement weather. Healthy Learners students were so committed that they remained in service a full month past their semester’s end and were awarded a special letter of honor from the USM LAC college dean. Further, local public school teachers have spontaneously and anecdotally evaluated the program and students and found both to be successful. As part of course scholarship, students write term papers integrating readings with applied learning. These papers consistently demonstrate that students glean knowledge from the service-learning approach that could not have been obtained from a conventional undergraduate “theories of counseling” approach. While student abilities vary in the capacity to relate theoretical material to clinical experience, student work-product from this course consistently indicates clear and accurate understanding and application of theoretical concepts in child development and counseling.

As a further measure of course success, USM LAC standardized student course evaluations consistently indicate a high degree of student satisfaction with, and perceived usefulness of, the Healthy Learners course. The evaluations consist of 24 questions regarding assets of the course and instructor consistent with the university mission and philosophy of education. Each question is worded positively in terms of

course quality and is numerically rated by the student on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 corresponding to “strongly agree” and 5 corresponding to “strongly disagree.” The cumulative mean rating for all questions for the Healthy Learner’s course over the past eight years the course has been taught is 1.14, indicating a consistently high degree of student satisfaction, perceived value, and appreciation for the Healthy Learners course.

As described previously, the vast majority of USM LAC students are non-traditional “commuter students”; most of them are first-generation college students and in many cases they have not had positive histories with education. Many are also parents (some, grandparents), balancing work and family obligations along with their studies. For these students, the opportunity to apply their experiential expertise; their familiarity in working with children and with the school systems; and their life-based understanding of the obstacles and frustrations involved in working within school administrations, can be a powerful boost to their self-esteem and confidence. Sometimes, this affirmation of their inherent expertise can be the catalyst which encourages them to continue in school under trying circumstances. Some such students find that building on this life experience allows them to perform quite well academically in this and other similar application-based classes. Further, their appreciation of their potential role in promoting positive development and aspirations in children very much like themselves and their own children can be tremendously empowering and transformative as they recognize the power of their role in redefining their community’s norms about education.

The applied learning opportunities afforded by the Healthy Learners course also provide well-adapted professional preparation for future counselors, clinicians, and teachers. Not only do the experiential learning, multilevel supervision, and theory-based course provide excellent preparation for future work with children, but the experience can also incline students more or less in this direction as a chosen field. The exposure to the day-to-day challenges of working with children in the school system allows some students to screen themselves out of this profession. For most students however, the course whets their appetites for this fulfilling and demanding work. Especially for those entering teaching, counseling, and clinical professions, this applied experience is invaluable professional preparation.

Many USM LAC students have resided in Androscoggin County since before the Lewiston site of the university existed; after graduation, most continue to reside locally. In four of the eight years the Healthy Learners program has been implemented, an LAC Child Associate has served in the same elementary school she attended as a primary school student. Further, USM LAC graduates frequently continue to serve the same community they did when enrolled in Healthy Learners. They work as childcare workers and owners, foster care parents, PTO officers, teachers, social workers, and a variety of in-home social service workers. This program builds the capacity of our community quite directly, since it trains them future counselors and teachers with the very population, and in the same schools, where many of them eventually work professionally. This preparation is all the more critical for students who do not go on

to graduate school, but enter into human service work in the community directly upon graduation from USM LAC.

As they build relationships with their classmates, their faculty instructor, and their site supervisor, as well as the children with whom they work, student connections to each other, to the community, and to the college are reinforced. These relationships and sense of belonging have been shown to contribute to student success and sustainability (Keup 2005; Picket-May and Avery 2001). Especially for a commuter campus of non-traditional students, many of whom are parents themselves, and a number of whom were vulnerable children facing many of the same challenges as the children with whom they work, these experiences are invaluable in building on their inherent expertise, striking the relevance of their education, and reinvigorating their interest in college.

Applied experiences do not come without obstacles, however. The Healthy Learners class, like many community-based classes, requires more scheduled out-of-class time than a traditionally framed college class. Especially for students balancing multiple demands of family and work outside of school, this additional time and energy can be quite onerous. It is not uncommon to hear from students that they are “spending more time with the children in this class than with [their] own children” or to have them report some feelings of envy at the services and time afforded the children in this program when their “own children could have benefited from a program like this if only there were one in [their] school.” Of course challenges like these can also be used as opportunities for advocacy and for education regarding clinical issues around boundaries, transference, and clinical-use-of self, as will be discussed in the Recommendations section of this article.

Supervision in Healthy Learners

Professional preparation occurs at another, more intricate level as well in the Healthy Learners course. In order to integrate the service-learning model with course curriculum and to provide the supervision necessary to an ongoing dynamic intervention, university student Child Associates are supervised on three levels: individually by the university faculty member; on site, by the clinician at the school; and through peer/group supervision by the Healthy Learners class members themselves.

Community-based professional preparation programs generally provide the multilevel supervision of a site supervisor and an academic supervisor, but many do not add the additional layer of group peer supervision. Meeting weekly to review and reflect on their individual work with the children, as well as to apply the theory and skills to the interventions they discuss, the Healthy Learners class provides feedback and support to its members, while benefiting from the supervision and guidance of the faculty supervisor. As discussed above, many USM LAC students have rich backgrounds in child care, as well as life experience to lend to the discussion. By sharing experiences, the pool of anecdotal and applied material is multiplied by the number of students in the class. Through such a model, students learn multiple approaches and responses, as well as a more expansive perspective in assessing issues. Similarly, by sharing their

frustrations about program limitations and working with professional counselors, administration, and the school system, students together can brainstorm problem-solving and facilitation techniques as they learn policy applications.

Exposure to the group/peer supervision model provides future professionals a foundation for a model of support and supervision which may be critical to their own professional success and sustainability. Many professional counselors (particularly those working with limited resources or for large public agencies) find that, once they have fulfilled their educational and licensing requirements, supervision and support become increasingly less available. Having learned the values of peer and group supervision, such professionals may be more likely to seek out and develop these networks for themselves.

Multiple approaches to supervision can also overcome the fact that, despite efforts to the contrary, students may not always feel or be adequately supervised on site. There is great variety in the availability of site supervisors at the schools and in the quality of their supervision. In addition, individual student needs vary, as do the ways they interact with their assigned children and supervisors, which may not always be optimal. With three supervisory models functioning simultaneously, and sufficient screening and preparation of school-based counselors so that only those interested and sufficiently accessible participate, these potential problematic issues can be remedied and balanced before they become untenable.

Unique Role of University Students

Another noteworthy facet of this school-based service-learning program is the hybrid role of the university student Child Associates. They work with children in the public schools on a regular basis, but they are not paid professional school staff. This role carries with it a complex array of assets and frustrations. On the positive side, having university students regularly present in the schools, in classrooms, in clinical conferences, and in the cafeteria can infuse the work at the schools with up-to-date, current information in the field; add the perspective of the latest research; and offer the freshness of a new and “outside” angle. Where professional staff are open to learning from the university students, their application of current academic theory and research to the case examples of school personnel can enrich understanding and build knowledge in a sustainable mutual relationship.

Not being a part of the formal professional school administration and role expectations, university students often have creative ideas about how to work between and amongst systems, and may not be as easily put off by structural limitations, intimidated by authority, or “burned out” by long term frustrations. Students are often neither privy to, nor caught up in, the biases which may develop from having a long history with a child, such as when a child has a negative reputation at a school or her family is “well-known” as being problematic. Of course this lack of history and inside knowledge also breeds challenges, as students may not fully understand how the administrative system works at a school, may inadvertently get caught in the middle of

power dynamics, or may be reluctant to share information because of their own lack of knowledge. Similarly, not knowing the long history of a child may mean they miss contextual clues or fail to avail themselves of timely resources or networks of support.

Students may feel uncomfortable or alien in their outside-in roles in schools: they don't know anyone in the lunch room, they may not be able to use the copier, and they may not know how or when to get calls or mail. This can be particularly problematic when they miss out on crucial correspondence about a clinical meeting that they are to be a part of or about a critical change in schedule. The awkwardness of this mixed role can breed resentment if students are perceived not to be adequately performing their roles. Sometimes students, as unpaid workers with their own jobs and families, may not be reliable staffers. If not adequately cautioned and contracted, students may miss appointments or skip critical supervision meetings or assignments necessary to their full appreciation of the material.

The role students play by performing work traditionally carried out by professionals can also create tensions on another level. If not adequately framed and arranged, university students may be seen as substituting for professional staff at the schools. Since these students work "for free," professional staff may feel threatened by the students. There is also the potential for students to be exploited or used as a rationale for staffing cuts. In such trying economic times as those we now face, it is vital to programs like these that such misinterpretations not be allowed to take hold. On the contrary, students facing resource limitations and administrative frustrations can be empowered to be advocates for the school system and the need for fully developed resources.

Amplification of Resources for Institutions

The collaborative partnership of the university with the community school affords potential great amplification of resources. The partnership provides the school the possibility to extend its resources directly by providing the student-staff to work with children that the school guidance counselor could not otherwise work into her busy schedule. For most public school counselors, time is consumed intervening in groups or in crisis cases and the primary prevention afforded to individual at-risk children through the Primary Project is a luxury they cannot afford. However, each university Child Associate can see two or three children, adding many to the ranks of approachable cases under each counselor's supervision. In addition to the college students, the partnership can also benefit from the technology, training, research and resources of the university, as well as other projects and relationships. Having opened the door with Healthy Learners in one school, there is now a Green Team supervised by a USM student at that school; another school hosts a lunch time art program designed by a USM student. Through the Healthy Learners program the community schools become increasingly familiar with the college and its resources and begin to seek us out for other collaborative opportunities. As public institutions suffer under the heavy weight of economic turmoil and staffing cuts, the amplification of resources through collaborative partnerships may be the key to mutual sustainability and reinvention.

Professional staff at both the schools and colleges also experience mixed results from this service-learning experience. School counselors see their case numbers expanded and may also be faced with an onerous supervision burden. They may find the oversight and coordination of the students more cumbersome than valuable. For higher education faculty, especially those in the human service fields, such classes provide an opportunity to maintain clinical experience and contact while applying academic rigor. The work of such programs for faculty is often validating, exciting, and engaging (Hodge et al. 2001). However, most universities do not consistently reward faculty participation in community engagement experiences like the Healthy Learners program. Classes like these take a great deal of faculty time and energy to administer and often may not be recognized fully in tenure and promotion reviews (O’Byrne, 2001; Rogge and Rocha 2004).

Impact on Children and Community

The most far-reaching impact of the service-learning model of the Healthy Learners program is in its impact on the children served by the program, and, through them, on their families and communities. The clinical improvements demonstrated by the program are documented in the first section of this paper. The impacts described here are those unique to the service-learning model of the program. As discussed above, the USM LAC Healthy Learners program operates in Androscoggin County, an economically challenged region with a history of low levels of postsecondary educational achievement. In such an area, the potential for fostering aspirations and familiarity with higher education amongst our young people cannot be overvalued. Exposure to college culture, both through preservice college placements and through direct contact with colleges and universities, shows promise in increasing the college aspirations of youth (Radcliffe and Stephens 2008). While the Healthy Learners project is aimed at the early grades, exposure to college students and faculty also promotes a difference in organizational culture that can better support children’s college aspirations (McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez 2002).

Negotiating Time-limited Relationships

One challenge which perpetually arises in university service-learning programs placed in community settings is to coordinate the scheduling and timing of university student calendars with those of the public school. In a nutshell, the challenge is this: university students typically attend classes once a week for a 14-week semester, while public school students attend daily for ten months. Working from college schedules means the dyad relationships of the Child Associate and child usually last a short 10–12 weeks.

As superficial as an initial review of the issue of competing school schedules may seem, we consider this challenge last because it exemplifies nearly all of the ramifications and potential involved in coordinating the interests of collaborative partners. In order to untie the scheduling knots, due consideration must be given to the relative missions of the partners; the goals and objectives of the service-learning program; the balancing of

competing interests; as well as the potential for learning opportunities, reflection, and advocacy for change derived from the challenges confronted.

Recognizing that the children identified for intervention may require greater attention and consistency in their relationships, it would seem potentially harmful to foster such a term-limited relationship as one that a schoolchild has with a university Child Associate. Particularly when working with at-risk or traumatized youth, abbreviated relationships can be more harmful than beneficial (Rhodes 2002). Indeed, in the field of mentoring research, great controversy exists over whether short-term mentoring pairs should be developed at all, given the potential of exacerbating vulnerable children's histories with suddenly terminated relationships. However, this research describes ill-effects perpetuated by abruptly ending close relationships, failing to adequately prepare for closure in the relationship, or insufficiently garnering resources and support from relationships which do continue (Rhodes 2002). It is important to note that the Healthy Learners pairings differ greatly from traditional "mentoring" pairings. Mentoring describes a range of interventions, and usually implies support, encouragement, and guidance (Eby, Rhodes, and Allen 2007). Mentoring relationships emphasize the role and character of the mentor. The Primary Project model emphasizes non-directive support and reflection aimed at increasing the child's self-reliance. The Primary Project thus relies less directly on the character of the Child Associate, and specific guidance is not encouraged. Further, termination is addressed throughout the intervention, and so abrupt endings to the relationship are avoided. Finally, the selection process of the program selects at-risk children but not the most vulnerable children, and the efficacy of the selection procedures has been empirically demonstrated.

Nearly every school- or community-based service-learning program confronts similar issues. Particularly when such programs involve children and youth, our concern is great as we recognize the importance of not exacerbating or perpetuating vulnerabilities. However, working within the constraints of university semesters and college student schedules is amongst the necessary evils we must grapple with in arranging these programs. Using creative and thoughtful approaches to negotiate this issue, our experience indicates that even in traditional mentoring relationships, where such term-limited pairs are consistently maintained through a planned and gradual close, they can provide a lasting model for the healthy closure of relationships and for the well balanced sustenance of the many such time-limited relationships we in this society typically encounter. However, realizing that time and scheduling constraints are amongst the greatest challenges of program implementation, we also continue to seek out suggestions and modifications which minimize the difficulties posed by these challenges.

Recommendations for School-Based Service-Learning Programs

The Healthy Learners service-learning model of the Primary Project provides a valuable service both to the local elementary schools and to the university students

who enroll to expand their scholarship and service. The model has a high potential for replication in similar communities and with similar community school-based service-learning classes. Drawing from the unique challenges and assets pertaining to this service-learning model, the following recommendations are made for consideration of similar school-based service-learning programs:

1. Host preprogram orientation meetings with faculty and staff as well as students to ensure that project and student roles are appropriately framed. Mutuality of the relationship ought to be emphasized. Counselors and students should be established as advocates and support for each other rather than competitors.
2. Be sensitive to the multiple demands on students and prepare them for the variant demands of the class. From the beginning, and in the syllabus, it should be clear that there is a great deal of out-of-class time required and reading and writing loads should be adjusted to accommodate this. With students who are parents, faculty should be open about how the course content and experiences may touch sensitive issues and how these can be used as opportunities to learn about therapeutic boundaries and self-monitoring, as well as harnessing inherent expertise. Properly framed and supervised, these are ideal learning opportunities for dealing with the inevitable clinical issues that come up in such situations.
3. Carefully prescreen university students to be sure that nothing disqualifies them from a school-based placement with individual children and to ensure that they are well suited to the program. Students must understand from the beginning that this is not an “ordinary” class or experience. Attendance at all classes and times with children must be emphasized as mandatory and students should sign a contract to this effect. Circumstances sometimes require a student to miss or drop a class, so the clearer faculty are with expectations from the beginning, the better.
4. Encourage students to discuss the awkwardness and challenges raised by limited resources, their hybrid role, and other unique elements of the experience. Use these discussions as a means for empowerment and advocacy so that they can better understand the underlying issues that counselors and children in need may be facing.
5. Develop a support position for assistance with coordination and administration of the service-learning program. This may be developed by offering a previous student of the course an independent study or work study position to help coordinate the program or, where possible, obtaining funding to support a staff position to facilitate the coordination piece.
6. Recognize the time and effort the program may be asking of professional staff in schools and give thanks and recognition to school counselors however possible. Build in a certificate for supervision or some other recognition of their supervisory work. Provide opportunities for continuing education and networking for the counselors by inviting them to class meetings on themes of general interest. Ask school staff their input and suggestions regarding what they would like to get out of program.

7. Clearly articulate student roles in advance of the program's inception. This helps to avoid breeding resentment or exploitation of students, as well as misunderstandings regarding relative responsibility. Students must be apprised of the complications and urged to consider the challenges they may pose to the system. A well informed student can be a powerful advocate for school staff and expansion of resources, rather than being used and exploited as an inexpensive substitute.
8. Make efforts to use the collaborative relationship at multiple levels to maximize aspirations and access to higher education. Students should inform the children they work with that they are college students and devote attention to inquiries about their college experiences. In some programs, this may be done as part of the intervention itself. Because of the child-centered nature of the Primary Project, university student-led discussion during the intervention would be contrary to the intent of the direct intervention, but events outside the session time could be contrived (such as a field trip to the college) without sacrificing treatment fidelity. Communications to parents should note the role of college and student as well as the potential value of the connection to the college. Fostering opportunities to have children and community members visit the college, meet college students and faculty, or participate in college programs may also be additional methods of enhancing aspirations and connection to higher education.
9. Recognize the limitations imposed by the disconnection between the university schedule and the "real world," or at least the public school calendar. Consider multiple and alternate models for these programs to maximize accessibility and participation. Some possible alternative models include offering the class on alternating weeks through an entire year; offering the class as a sequential series encompassing two consecutive semesters; creating a "feeder" mechanism as implementation for one semester, in which students take the community engagement experience as a supplement (perhaps for additional credit) to a different class in one semester (such as Children in Society, Child Development; Applied Social Policy; Modern Education) and a designated service-learning class (such as Healthy Learners) the other semester; or developing a flexible community engagement social science "laboratory" for students to participate in community experiences for credit.
10. Provide students opportunities to reflect on their service-learning experience openly and honestly with the faculty supervisor (and perhaps classmates), and to share their recommendations with the staff at the school. This lends validation to their work and allows staff to learn from that which they may not have shared previously.
11. Termination of any relationship with vulnerable youth should be approached intentionally and seriously. In the Primary Project, termination is approached individually and considered throughout the time-limited intervention. Other programs will have different ideal ways for approaching the end of a supportive relationship. For some programs it may work well to build in a process or ritual for closure that allows some sustenance and sense of continuity for the child, such as a "graduation" ceremony, a letter to the child from a mentor, a scrapbook which is co-made by the youth and his worker, or a piece of art work for the school made by the group—something lasting which invites reflection and a feeling of perpetuity.

Conclusion

The Healthy Learners program described here is but one example of a successful school-based service-learning program which fulfills its goals on several levels. Like other school-based programs, the Healthy Learners program fosters resiliency and builds assets in the young children participating in the program. In addition, this program develops skills and prepares college students as this community's future counselors. The collaboration of USM LAC with the local public schools allows the institutions to enhance their resources, maximize their productivity, and promote their mutual learning.

Overall, the program strengthens the local community through the integration of college students in the schools, developing their own assets as they foster the aspirations and connections of the young people with whom they work as well as the communities they enhance. Through their involvement, these often first-generation college students reinvent their own and the community's identity, infusing the schools they inhabit with a culture of higher education and college accessibility. Child-focused service-learning programs which integrate the resources, students, and staff of the colleges into the communities build their own capacity as they serve to recruit future college students by fostering aspirations and exposure to higher education. These programs not only prepare our future students to go to college, but prepare our colleges to respond to the changing needs of these students and to incorporate them into our learning and the development of our curricula.

Recommendations for promoting school-based service-learning programs seem particularly timely as circumstances surrounding community service are in a time of transition. Daily, news headlines report increasing ramifications of poor economic conditions. At the same time, a new era of political, economic, and social policy is being ushered in that may mean the expansion of service- and community-based programs, the likes of which has not been seen in decades. Recently, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act has passed both houses of Congress. This legislation is designed to expand service-learning in schools, multiply the "army" of VISTA workers in communities, and support college students at greater levels in their community-based service work. There is now both great need and great opportunity for the building of school-based service-learning programs that can span the divide between present realities and our expanded aspirations. It is likely the bridge will be found in the potential of college students, transforming their communities as they reinvent themselves.

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