

ISSUES IN TEACHING
AND LEARNING

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ITL, published under the auspices of Rhode Island College, is an e-journal that seeks to foster and deepen pedagogical dialogue and by extension improve the teaching and learning process among Rhode Island College faculty and others.

We are excited to share with you this newest volume of *Issues in Teaching and Learning (ITL)*, our tenth. The first volume of *ITL* was published in 2002 and in it, the editor Sandra Enos explained that “The mission of the journal is to create and deepen dialogue among the faculty and others about teaching and learning and to create a forum for productive interdisciplinary conversations about the art and practice of teaching.” We are pleased to carry these objectives forward with this latest volume of *ITL*, which focuses on civic or community engagement, a key element of RIC’s mission and strategic plan. Specifically, this volume attempts to answer the question: In what ways does Rhode Island College engage with communities beyond its campus borders?

We bring you a number of different answers to this question. In our first article, “Service Learning Reflection as Critical Pedagogy,” Dr. Robyn Linde (Political Science) shares her thoughts on creating service-learning courses in which students engage with local Rhode Island community organizations. With an approach rooted in the work of Paolo Freire and his notion of critical pedagogy, Linde shares the challenges of helping students envision themselves as “global citizens and agents of change.” Following Dr. Linde’s article, we have a second piece which takes up the topic of teaching via community engagement, “Advocacy Research: From Classroom To Community, and Student To Leader,” by Dr. Holly Dygert (Anthropology). Dr. Dygert shares her experience teaching Applied Anthropology, a course in which students take the knowledge and frameworks they develop in the classroom out into the community to discover the ways in which “anthropological skills can address current social problems.” A third article, “International Service Learning,” by Dr. Jill Harrison (Sociology), also addresses the pedagogy of teaching and community engagement, but the community with which Dr. Harrison engages is at a far remove from the RIC campus. Dr. Harrison shares stories from her recent trips to Ecuador, where she and her students have worked with refugees, street children, and victims of domestic violence. She includes the words of students in her piece, bringing to life the diversity of knowledge and experience they develop on these transformative ventures. Finally, in her essay “Building Bridges Between the Classroom and the Internship,” Dr. Mimi Mumm (Social Work) shares her experience with the challenges of keeping the lines of communication open between herself, her students, and the field site supervisors who supervise social work interns in the local community.

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Shifting from a focus on classrooms to more larger-scale efforts to engage the community beyond RIC, Dr. Corrine McKamey (Elementary Education), in her article, “A Pedagogy of Community Engagement,” shares her experience creating a new Youth Development (YDEV) B.A. program. Dr. McKamey describes how community engagement as a pedagogical practice connects classroom, program, and community. In “Community Service in the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development: A First Effort at Data Collection,” Liz Garofalo (FSEHD) takes up the question of the ways in which an entire college, in this case, the Feinstein School, engages with the community. Finally, in “A Truly Innovative Partnership: RIC/Central Falls Innovation Lab,” Dr. Carolyn Obel-Omia (Elementary Education) reports on developments with the RIC/Central Falls collaboration, a community engagement initiative which engages the RIC campus community as a whole.

We close out this issue with a short reflection on teaching from Dr. Yael Avissar (Biology). After over thirty years of teaching, Dr. Avissar is retiring from RIC at the end of the calendar year (December, 2014). While her essay, “How Teaching Transformed Me,” does not connect explicitly to this volume’s focus on community engagement, we appreciated the story of her journey as a teacher so much that we felt the need to include it in these pages. We wish Dr. Avissar the best in her retirement.

In closing, we would like to thank both our contributors and the members of our Editorial Board: Carolyn Obel-Omia and Roderick Graham. As the Board assembled this volume, we were amazed at the myriad ways in which our faculty and students reach beyond the borders of our campus to engage with broader communities and constituencies in Rhode Island and beyond. Without a doubt, the work described in this volume serves as evidence of our efforts to meet the civic and community engagement goals outlined in RIC’s most recent Strategic Plan. Since its founding as a normal school in 1854, RIC has been an institution of higher learning that has bridged the border between campus and community. The stories you find

in these pages illustrate just a few of the important ways in which we continue to engage with world beyond our door.

Michael Michaud, Ph.D. (English)

Bonnie MacDonald, Ph.D. (Communication, FCTL Director)

April, 2014



Above: Jennifer Tejada and Nephtali Navarro organize a game at an orphanage Quito, Ecuador (full story on page 8). Photo by Kellie Moreau.

Below: Youth Development Major Justin Davis works with a group of students from Central Falls (full story on page 12). Photo by Gene St. Pierre.



SERVICE LEARNING REFLECTION AS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

by Robyn Linde, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Political Science

With its origins in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), critical pedagogy is a type of teaching and learning that views traditional pedagogy as reinforcement of the status quo (and as means of oppression). By contrast, a critical pedagogy focuses on the ability of individuals to be transformed through the critical exploration of race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, sexuality and citizenship.

While any type of course can be a laboratory for critical pedagogy, a service-learning course is especially suited to fulfilling many of its fundamental tenets, most importantly the idea that students are co-creators of knowledge. Service learning in general is premised on the idea that educators and students should do more than passively and uncritically accept an unchanging curriculum on a path to tenure or a degree. Reflection, or the exercise of linking experience with theory, is a key part of knowledge production in the classroom. I see reflection as a type of learning that is mindful, one that examines individual experiences through a wide lens that challenges pre-conceived ideas.

As a political science professor, I develop service-learning opportunities in a few of my classes (human rights, social movements) which I teach about every third year, but each spring I identify and develop a service-learning project for my INGOs (International Nongovernmental Organizations) and Social Entrepreneurship course. This project is the course's central component. Students commit to working 25-30 hours per semester for a local organization on a project of their choosing (and often, of their design) as well as participating in course discussion, evaluation, and reflection or review in terms of both course material and the project.

Last spring, we partnered with Healthy Families Initiative (HFI), a local organization that works to eradicate domestic violence in Muslim communities. My students drafted applications for federal and state grants on behalf of HFI; developed



Standing: Mandie Ellis '13 (Political Science/INGOs); Seated: Annie Dickson '13 (Political Science/INGOs), Maria Murcia Lopez '14 (Political Science/INGOs), Stephanie Goetz '14 (Anthropology/INGOs), Sarita Amorim (Political Science) and Timothy McLaughlin (Political Science/INGOs).

Photo by Robyn Linde.

HFI's web presence, which included securing a domain name, designing the website and establishing Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr pages; organized a raffle; created fundraising templates for future use; produced a volunteer packet; drafted the bylaws and standard operating procedures for the new board and reviewed the procedures for 501(c)3 status; researched grant requirements and organized trainings to meet these requirements; and developed a database through Filemaker Pro to organize contacts for the organization. This semester we are partnering with the Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, where students are helping refugee families get settled; serving as mentors to new refugees; designing a fundraising and community stakeholder database; and holding fundraisers to collect needed supplies and work-related gear for new refugees.

In my INGOs courses, our aim is to understand systemic structural constraints, the construction of social problems, the connection between power and truth and the potential of individual agency – all areas of critical exploration. I don't give a single lecture in my social entrepreneurship course; instead I employ a number of active learning methods: mostly

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problem-based learning in small groups, in-class writing and case-study discussion. We consider the Global South and its interactions with international institutions as well as the accomplishments of individuals and organizations located in the Global South in creating social and political change. The course itself is “problem-posing” (as opposed to knowledge-imparting), and its content is dynamic and variable according to students’ specific project experiences.

Most important for the purposes of critical pedagogy: *My students go out in the community and have relevant and valuable experiences that are a central part of the course and of which I have limited knowledge and control.* While I bring to the classroom knowledge of the discipline, of the relevant scholarship and an expertise in nongovernmental organizations, they bring the benefit of their engagement and firsthand experiences with an organization working for change at the community level. In other words, through service learning, students become their own source of expertise. They develop knowledge and insight that complements my own, and in so doing, they co-constitute the course material. Their project experiences share equal billing with other course components, producing a richer, more meaningful – and more personal – educational experience.

The greatest challenge of teaching a service-learning course is not in finding appropriate community partners, arranging worthwhile projects or getting buy-in from students, although these are all issues. The real challenge is in stimulating genuine and effective reflection. The goal of reflection is to connect students’ experiences with the ideas discussed and from this, to develop our own theories of sociopolitical change – as well as to contemplate our agency in this process. If done well, reflection can advance learning in a way that neither course readings nor internships alone can, but it is no easy task. Success hinges on our collective ability to draw insight and perspective from our diverse experiences, to link these experiences to our broader pedagogical goals, and to use these experiences as an essential tool in a critical approach to learning. Freire put it best: “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). While messy, this type of inquiry helps students connect their studies with the needs of the community – to see themselves in their work with NGOs and nonprofits as global citizens and agents of change.

Elisa Boschetti ‘13 (Political Science, INGOS and Spanish) worked with the Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island to welcome Iraqi refugees to the United States. Boschetti (standing) is pictured here with the Al Tekreeti family – Rawan (left), Ban (center), and Rīyam (right) – during their first meal in Rhode Island.

Photo courtesy Elisa Boschetti.



ADVOCACY RESEARCH: FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY, AND STUDENT TO LEADER

by Holly Dygert, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Anthropology

I am a sociocultural anthropologist with expertise in economic development, gender, reproductive health and indigenous rights. Power and social justice are pivotal to each of these domains, and I engage students in the analysis of social inequalities and ongoing struggles against them in all of my classes. My ultimate aim in doing so is to provide students with tools to critically evaluate the social relations that frame their own lives, and to consider and imagine other possibilities. To facilitate this, I have developed course projects that require students to take the methodologies, knowledge and frameworks that we examine in the classroom into their communities. An abundant body of work has documented the benefits of this kind of active, community-based learning for students (see, e.g., Astin et.al. 2000). Here, I use examples from one course project to support my contention that this kind of learning bolsters and expands the particular educational work that we do here at Rhode Island College: preparing a primarily local student body to lead and serve their communities.

The important contributions our professional schools make to preparing students to serve our communities as educators, social workers and health professionals are widely acknowledged. What is less well known – and what community leaders across the nation seem to be increasingly calling into question – is how a liberal arts education contributes to these same aims. I strongly support the core liberal arts notion that education should prepare students to think beyond the particular ways in which we organize our communities today, to envision new possibilities. Yet, I also believe that we often fall short in helping students translate these tools to real world problem-solving contexts. The project that I describe here crystalized for students how their training has prepared them to take on leadership roles in their communities, becoming advocates for positive change.



Property in the “Tidewater” site neighborhood. Photo by Holly Dygert.

The project was conducted by students in my Applied Anthropology (ANTH 332) course during the Spring of 2012. It focused on the management of a former manufactured gas plant in Pawtucket, the “Tidewater” site. The twenty-three acre site borders a residential community to the west and the Seekonk River to the east. I began researching the site during the Fall of 2010, a few weeks after my daughter began Kindergarten at one of the three schools that lie adjacent to the property. Since then, I have engaged in a long-term activist and advocacy anthropological project (Hale 2006, 2008; Speed 2008), studying the ongoing management of the property; participating in and hosting community meetings; and reaching out to residents, community organizations, officials, and others to help ensure that the site is managed with regard for community health.

At the time the course began, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) was considering a remediation proposal from the site’s owner, National Grid. If RIDEM were to accept the proposal, a community meeting would be held to present it to the public and solicit feedback. RIDEM would consider the feedback before finally determin-

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A bird's-eye view of the 23-acre "Tidewater" site. Photo by Holly Dygert.

ing whether to accept the plan. I was working with the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island to inform the public of the history of the site's management, so they could take that into account while evaluating the remediation proposal.

In this context, I worked with the students to design a project with dual scientific and applied aims: to glean insights into the social processes surrounding the management of the site, and to provide community members with information to improve their ability to participate in these processes. During the course of the semester, each student reviewed and synthesized a component of the background material, visited the property and wrote a description of the site, observed an event related to the site's management, and contributed to interviews with officials. This information was shared with the class on Blackboard, and some contributions were highlighted through in-class presentations. To fulfill the applied objectives of the project, students summarized information on the history of the site, chemicals of concern and their health impacts for the community. To achieve the scientific

objectives, I selected data to review in class to illustrate different modes of critical analysis.

I invited students to think creatively about the kind of "product" they wanted to submit for their final grade, considering the range of media that can be used to communicate information. The students produced a wonderful collection of works, ranging from traditional research papers to a series of poems, an illustrated children's book, a short film, and a website that was used to share the information with the public. Later, students presented the work in two academic forums – Rhode Island College's Annual Engaging Conversations conference, and the Northeastern Anthropological Association's Annual Meetings in College Park, Maryland.

Though I designed the project to highlight how particular anthropological skills can help us address current social challenges, I maintain that it captured the broader value and significance of a distinctly liberal arts education, with its emphasis on providing students with the skills they need to critically interrogate the status quo, and to imagine alternatives. More-

over, I believe that the project was especially impactful because the process led students to envision themselves as community leaders. Through the process of documenting and reading about the site, identifying potential harms, interacting with residents, and interviewing officials, many students came to feel a sense of responsibility to the impacted community. Thus, most went above and beyond the requirements of the course, for example, by collecting additional background information, attending additional meetings, writing an editorial in the student paper, and signing a petition requesting that the Department of Environmental Management require the property owner to develop a Public Involvement Plan for the site. In short, they became community advocates. Since graduating, four of the nine students have drawn from their experience with the project to pursue new opportunities: two have sought work in the local non-profit sector, and two have applied to graduate programs that they selected to prepare them to do community work directly related to the project.

Paradoxically, advocacy work is often seen as a luxury that only privileged students can afford to undertake. This assumption helps reproduce class-based hierarchies in which crucial decisions about how our society is organized are made by the elite. I am hopeful that projects like the one I have described here will help encourage and prepare local students to take on leadership roles in our communities.

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INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

by Jill Harrison, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Sociology

When I first began field work in South America during my Master's Degree, I ran across a quote from an academic that said something like, 'Never let books interfere with your education.' At the time, I thought that was a funny thing for a social scientist to write. But as I became more involved in working with street children in Bogotá, Colombia, I appreciated its meaning more and more: leaping into field work experience, particularly with impoverished groups in so much need, created a passion in me for my discipline and made me a life-long student, eager to learn and ready for the next adventure. By my field experiences, I wanted to learn more, read more, and do more with the groups I was privileged to work with. It was this motivation that inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. and focus on applied research and teaching. Now this focus allows me to offer service learning experiences to Rhode Island College students in Ecuador.

Over the past four years, twenty-two students have accompanied me to Ecuador where they have worked with refugees, street children, orphans, women and children of domestic violence, and spent time visiting with incarcerated women. RIC nursing students have also assisted with an HIV prevention conference held at a local university. Students from a variety of disciplines at the College have made this investment in their education: sociology, justice studies, social work, psychology, political science, education, nursing, and philosophy. Although there is now an academic component that links their on the ground experience with contemporary readings in a wide array of academic literature, clearly what penetrates students' minds and hearts is their interaction with the target population and the perspective their experiences brings to their own lives. With permission from the students, here are some highlights from our 2014 service learning class in which students spent ten days working with disadvantaged youth in a small town in the Amazon jungle and in two non-profit foundations in Quito, Ecuador's capital city:

Jarret, Justice Studies Major: "Overall, this was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Studying the culture hands on as well as through the readings and videos provided for a full view of what Ecuador holds. Especially upon returning home, it seemed as though I saw my life through a new perspective... The biggest thing I took from the trip had to deal with the poverty there and the lifestyles of the locals. For the majority, the people I met and encountered were overall happy and generous people. For people who have so little, yet are so generous and grateful, it opened my eyes to how well we have it here and how much we take for granted..."



Hot house tomato help: assisting Opcion de Vida, a nonprofit organization that supports marginalized youth, in growing their own food.

Photo by Jill Harrison.

Jen, Social Work Major: "On the way to the Amazon town of Huaticocha I got to see the amazing Los Andes Mountains and a lot of rivers... I saw a part of the mountains that has waterfalls coming out of it. This sight was absolutely breathtaking. I would have never imagined viewing something so beautiful in person. Once we got to the town, I really took my time to observe their culture. It humbled me a lot... I am sad that today I will be leaving the innocent children behind. I really wish there were more I could to help out in this community... I realize I am happiest when I am giving back to others..."

Katie, Social Work Major: “We all ran around with the kids for 2 hours. I was touched by how genuinely happy and excited the kids were to play with us. They all hugged us and wanted to be held. The language barrier was not as bad as I expected and I tried to practice more of my Spanish with the kids. Their smiles really made my day and spending time with them was the best part of the trip thus far. The kids were so happy with so little. We played hopscotch, tag, duck duck goose, and carried them around on our backs. Seeing kids so happy for us to be around in turn made me very happy.”

Emily, Social Work Major: “The lack of American culture and traditional responsibilities was so freeing. I loved waking up in the morning and not having to worry about the traditional beauty standards of doing my hair and makeup. I also loved not checking my phone or using the internet... It really changed my view on our culture, and I am able to put value in a much more simple way of life. I’m sad as I go to sleep tonight knowing that I have to leave the jungle in the morning. I am already thinking about how badly I want to come

back and spend much more time here. I can hear the monkeys in the trees as I try to fall asleep and think about how amazing this experience has been...”

John, Justice Studies/Philosophy Major: “I had the time of my life on this trip and the highlights weren’t zip-lining, swimming in the waterfall (although it’s close), or the view from the top of the volcano. As cliché as it may sound, it was actually meeting the people...and the group I went down with. We all became really close and I hope to maintain contact with the people from Ecuador and maintain friendships with the group of people I went down there with...”

Toby, Political Science Major: “Today was a great day! After waking to another delicious breakfast, a group of us went to Opcion de Vida, a foundation that works with children from troubled households. We played soccer and introduced ourselves... Afterward we all went to the green house to weed and trench the rowdy tomato beds. We sang and danced and enjoyed every bit...”



Nephtali Navarro chats with children at a local orphanage. Photo by Kellie Moreau.

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Neph, Sociology Major: “Today has been an overwhelming and humbling day. I got the chance to get acquainted once again with the founder of Opcion de Vida. Today was the last day. I refused to pack my luggage. I did not want to go back to the States...”

Meaghan, Psychology Major: “I appreciate the focus of life down here... That it isn’t based on superficial tangible objects, but on sustaining life and having a loving community. There are obvious downfalls to the lifestyle – malnutrition, dental and health care needs that these children lack. It makes me want to be more involved... [At the orphanage:] All that the kids want is affection and to play...and they treat each other like family. It took a little while for the reality of why they were there to hit me, which I am grateful for. They all seem so happy and excited to play and they giggle nonstop. It is hard to picture what the circumstances were that put them here (incarcerated parents, physical and sexual abuse in the home). It seems like every group of people I meet show me the definition of resiliency... When we were told that the orphanage needs psychologists, nurses, and educators, I immediately started to think of ways that RIC could help...”

Kellie, Social Work Major: “This amazing experience in Ecuador is coming to an end. The last ten days have been life changing. Being able to help those who are of the most need in such a beautiful place has made me appreciate all that I have even more... Definitely leaving part of my heart here!”

Emma, Social Work Major: “Leaving the jungle to head back to Quito. Literally had the most amazing time and met amazing people! I had too much fun with the kids! Am missing the jungle already, wish I could stay there forever...”

Meaghan, Psychology Major: “Tickling and piggyback rides are universal! These kids’ happiness in such obvious poverty was humbling and inspiring. We all felt some kind of bitter-sweet magic... I’d rather not go home. I’ve met three tarantulas so far and it’s still the greatest...”

John, Justice Studies/Philosophy Major: “I’m going to just live here forever...”

Providing students the opportunity to have these experiences continues to inspire me as a sociologist and teacher; but more than that, it is the students’ responses to whatever comes their way that *truly* amazes me. Ever present is a kinship for adventure and my enthusiasm builds as I see these students take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. They teach me by their willingness to engage, often despite their discomfort at using a foreign language; their lack of familiarity with the target population’s culture; and being situated thousands of miles away from home and family. They just open their hearts and minds and *do it!*

Making international service learning programs available in the curriculum is certainly a step toward enticing the intellectually-curious in the pursuit of life-long learning, but it is the students who joyfully leap into these academic adventures who are the real heroes here and need our support. From this latest exploration of poverty in rain forest towns, playing with orphans, to working with inner city street kids, the students embrace the day’s work with inquisitiveness, humor, and tremendous generosity. From these vignettes, just maybe other teachers and students will recognize, as we do, that books do not always interfere with education! To the contrary, these experiences are ripe with acquiring knowledge that surrounds us with every breath. Tarantulas, orphans, volcanoes, and street children: the magic is still in our eyes as we recount the time spent away from home. Through these programs, we say that international service learning opens up more doors than any classroom ever could. Let’s figure out how we can create and sustain these opportunities for our students in the future.

Opposite page (clockwise L-R): A small town in the Amazon where RIC students played with local children and helped get a school ready for opening day; Donkeys are a common form of transportation along the coast – near Manta; RIC students playing games with the children at the orphanage in Conocoto; A local market in Quito; The students visit downtown Quito; John Microulis being inundated with children wanting his attention at the orphanage in Conocoto.

Student group picture, donkey and market photos by Jill Harrison. Other photos courtesy Kellie Moreau.



A PEDAGOGY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

by Corinne McKamey, Ed.D.

Assistant Professor, Elementary Education

Co-Director of the Youth Development B.A. Program

“Youth work is a way of being, in which workers and youth create new moments that become part of their evolving narratives and view of self” (Krueger, 2007).

Youth development (YDEV) focuses on supporting youth in exploring and expressing their own identities and agency in their communities. Although it has historical roots in the settlement houses at the turn of the 20th century, YDEV is a fairly new field of higher education study and professional practice in the United States (Walker, Gambone, & Walker 2011). Nationally and at Rhode Island College, YDEV is a new interdisciplinary area of study and research. In 2008, for instance, only six major universities in the U.S. offered degrees in youth development (Fusco 2012a). Established in 2012, the RIC YDEV B.A. program is on the cutting edge of this higher education field. At RIC, the YDEV degree includes strands in education, social work, non-profit leadership, and a content minor/concentration. What binds these different content areas together is a process of community building – developing social environments that support collective learning and growth (Fusco 2012). Through a youth development lens, “community engagement” is not a product or thing to talk about, but instead is a process of facilitating, engaging and learning together in particular contexts and communities. In this article, I describe a pedagogy of community engagement that I use as a co-director and instructor within the YDEV program model for my students in their undergraduate classes. My aim is for students to experience this community building orientation in their RIC undergraduate classrooms and also to bring it into their own internship settings. YDEV students have internships across a wide variety of after-school programs and enrichment programs like the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO) at Central Falls High School.

In this essay I show how community engagement as a pedagogical practice threads across multiple connected contexts including a small classroom activity, a larger collaboration between RIC and the community organization Youth in Action, and a graduate education class (with possible fieldwork extensions into community organizations).



The Youth Development B.A. Program Logo

Image Copyright : James Weston

Problem solving and community building

One major pedagogical goal of youth development is for adults to collaborate with youth to find “meaningful opportunities to become problem solvers and community builders” (National Summit on Creative Youth Development, 2014). In both in-school and out-of-school settings, promoting collective problem solving requires adults to share their power and authority with youth. Across my YDEV and education courses, I often engage students in small, low stakes problem solving activities so that they can practice problem solving as a community. As illustrated in the case described below, disrupting my own authority as the teacher or “adult” in authority can sometimes be challenging, even in a short 30-minute activity. Here are the activity rules:

Round the World Challenge Rules

1. Students/Youth must pass a beach ball to each other such that each student touches the ball once, and each passer must say the name of the receiver.
2. I (the educator) time the circuit.
3. The start time begins when the first person passes the ball and ends when the first person gets the ball back again.
4. Students/Youth repeat this circuit challenge until they all agree that they have a reasonably fast time. It is possible for 30 students to do this in 10 seconds or less.

Although the game is different with each group of students or youth, some general patterns occur. At first, students sit in their seats and pass the ball across the room to each other in a random pattern. In their seats, the group usually cannot do better than 20 seconds. After they have been stuck for a while, students often look to me, the instructor in the room, for approval or solutions. When I first started doing this activity with students, I often gave concrete suggestions or advice. Over time, I have learned to say less and encourage more. My general response now is, “Don’t look to me for answers, look to each other.” The “solution,” which takes some groups longer to get to than others, involves students getting out of their seats and rearranging themselves in a way that enables them to quickly pass the ball to each other in the circuit. Students solve the problem sometimes in unexpected and interesting ways. For instance, one group created risers and made their hands into a giant human ramp for the ball.

When students eventually stand up out of their chairs to rearrange themselves, they “break” an implicit educational expectation that they sit in their seats, facing forward ready to listen to me, the instructor. When this break happens, there is a palpable emotional moment full of discomfort, tensions, and possibilities. As the group begins to problem solve, huddling closer in a circle together, I stand near the group as a timer and observer. I almost always learn with and about stu-

dents in ways I could not have in a traditional educational structure: who stands up first? Who are the outspoken leaders in the group? Who is reluctant to join the conversation? What ideas are shared and constructed? With what kind of solution and time is the group satisfied?

Although this activity is a single thirty-minute icebreaker, the activity and the relationships that develop within it provide a window into a much larger shift in developing collaborative communities of practice.

Youth in Action

The above icebreaker parable has echoed across many of my classes and relationships at RIC, especially as I have helped to develop the Youth Development B.A. Program. For instance, in fall 2013, Youth in Action (YIA) collaborated with Lesley Bogad and me to teach part of our undergraduate Youth Development seminar. A Providence-based youth organization, YIA focuses on fostering youth leadership, making positive community and social change, and recognizing diversity as a place of strength.

From my perspective as an instructor of undergraduates, it has been transformative and energizing to find undergraduate students and myself not talking about “youth out there” because youth “are right here” discussing, creating, and leading alongside us. In their course sessions, YIA youth and staff invited my undergraduate class to join them in activities (similar to the icebreaker described in the introduction of this essay) and protocols that disrupted the idea of adult authority and also enabled us as a community to learn more from each other and about each other. For instance, YIA began each session with a “Bug In” protocol where members of the group sat in a circle and passed a “talking stick” object around the room. As members of the circle received the object, they engaged in a particular kind of script that also allowed them to answer several question prompts related to the topic of the day:

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1. State the following: “Bug in. My name is xxx.”
2. Answer a question (E.g. How was your morning?).
3. Answer another question related to the topic of the day (E.g. What part of your identity are you most proud of?)
4. State the following: “Bug out.”

This protocol enables group members to “check in” with each other about small personal tidbits: who slept poorly last night, who is celebrating a birthday, who is feeling anxious about an upcoming test, who is excited that a family member is coming to visit today. The Bug In protocol also provides a way for members of the group to make and share personal connections with a topic that will be carried over into the larger discussion of the day. Rather than a single adult (the instructor) framing the topic, the collective group shares what they know about the topic and together begin framing out what they know.

In this and other interactive sessions, activities included everyone in the room: undergraduate students, high school aged youth in action, adult leaders of youth in action, and RIC professors. I often found myself not at the front of the room, professing my knowledge, but sitting with youth and students, participating in discussions and problem solving with others. Evaluations of youth and undergraduates who participated in this collaboration echoed the importance of learning collaboratively from each other. “We learned so much from each other,” one person wrote in his/her evaluation of the collaboration. Another respondent wrote, “Different perspectives were great!”

Importantly, at times high school youth from Youth In Action very successfully led collaborative-building activities in class. One high school youth of color from Providence remarked to me, “Before today, I didn’t know what to expect about college. Today, I didn’t just visit a college, I spoke and led a discussion in a college classroom.”



Multi-age audience members from the RIC and Central Falls Communities engage in a collective performance, “Comedy in the Classroom,” modeling literacy and behavior management practices for youth workers and teachers. Photo by Gene St. Pierre.



Top Left: Youth Development Major Justin Davis mirroring emotions through performing an improvisational taxi game. Top Right: Central Falls Middle School students Isaac Abad, Donte McLain and Jabri Costa. Above Center: Central Falls students and RIC Youth Development major Anthony Simmons together perform “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes. Photos by Gene St. Pierre.

A Pedagogy of Community Engagement

The fall collaboration between the YIA and the RIC YDEV program helped to pave the way for a larger college wide lecture in the spring. YIA presented a Worldviews in Education Lecture at RIC entitled, “You are DUMB until I give you this: Youth rethinking education.” In this presentation, with an audience of RIC undergraduates, graduates, and students from Brown, youth from YIA demonstrated the bug In protocol, talked about their experiences feeling invisible in schools, and began describing their own student-designed charter school. The YIA presentation prompted audience

members to think in more grounded ways about school quality, differing students’ experiences of schools, and youth-led community action.

For instance, inspired by the lecture, one member of my graduate class in organizational theory asked me, “Why aren’t we *doing* more in this and other graduate classes?” Another student offered, “This is an organizational theory class – we could volunteer as a class with YIA and help them construct their student-designed school.” I looked at the faces around the table. I shared my interest and own apprehensions, “I

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think that's an interesting idea, but I feel some tension and concern about a group of mostly white privileged graduate students inviting themselves to colonize a project envisioned by youth of color." I paused and looked around the room. I could see heads nodding and someone said, "Oh, yeah." There was a pause in the room and I said, "I do like your idea about *doing*, and I'm thinking that once we get through the major theoretical section of this class in a few weeks we could tweak the syllabus so that you all are applying the theories we have been learning about in class to more *doing* – observations and field experiences. What would that look like? What would you want to *do* in service of learning about organizational theory and leadership?"

The group brainstormed many projects, including observing each other in their organizational contexts and even analyzing the RIC graduate program organization. The group discussed ideas and also obstacles to completing a fieldwork component of the class. As we talked, I sat in the circle as a member and critical friend. I felt myself letting go of my syllabus and agenda as students discussed projects that would enable them to apply and learn about organizational theory in ways *they* imagined. In the middle of the conversation someone stopped and wondered aloud, "Wait, is it ok that we are doing this? What about the syllabus?" Students looked to me, much like the students in the ball icebreaker look to me when it's suddenly clear that they will have to stand up out of their seats and break out of their familiar, expected roles as students receiving information and following the instructor's directions.

Conclusion: Youth development as a way of being

Through the above vignette of a graduate class and through several other examples, I have shown what a pedagogy of community engagement looks like as it is embodied by community members within the situation. Each of these vignettes touched upon the next one, and the same pedagogy of community engagement rippled across each of these contexts: a small get-to-know you problem-solving activity, a larger collaboration between two organizations that used

many small get-to-know you thinking activities and also engaged in deeper dialogues and conversations about education, learning, and identity, a public lecture/discussion, and finally a classroom discussion where members imagined fieldwork within the community. In a way, I have both returned and expended the quote that begins this essay:

"Youth work is a way of being, in which workers and youth create new moments that become part of their evolving narratives and view of self" (Krueger, 2007).

Youth development – "youth work" – is not just a way of being that evolves individual narratives and views of self, but it also involves pedagogies of engagement that evolves and involves communities of people across contexts and time.

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BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN THE CLASSROOM AND THE INTERNSHIP

by Mimi Mumm, LICSW, Ph.D.
Professor, Social Work/MSW Program

I teach a first year practice course to Masters in Social Work students. At the start of the class, we discuss their expectations for learning and I collect contact information on their field instructor. The field instructor is their MSW supervisor at their internship. First year students spend 16 hours a week in the field placement for the academic year. After the first class, I send an introductory email to the field instructors. In this email, I thank them for participating in the students' learning and share a bit about myself. I emphasize the importance of collaboration between field and the classroom for successful student outcomes. I then attach the syllabus to the email.

At the beginning of each class, I ask students to share a story from the field placement. The student's story is connected to either the topic of class from the previous week or for the current week. For example in the first few weeks of class, we discuss engagement and interviewing skills. I would ask the students for a story that relates to these topics. After the student shares the story, I ask the classmates for feedback, if necessary we problem solve together on how the student could resolve the issue. I then continue with presenting the material for the week and engaging the student in skill building activities. Following class I then send the field instructors a brief email that summarizes the learning for the week and the first assignment that is due. If the story brings out "universal themes" for students, I mention that in my email. If issues arise in class that seem to be a theme for the students (such as being anxious or able to complete all that is required in graduate work) I include these themes and offer suggestions for activities the field instructor can do to help students.

For example, one student presented that the clients at her field placement want to 'friend her' on Facebook. This gives a great opportunity to discuss ethics and boundaries with new professionals. I then share with the field instructors something like,

"Today in class we discussed becoming a professional and developing professional boundaries between social workers and clients. We discussed the importance of differentiating between 'friends' and 'social workers.' Discussing agency policies about boundaries and contacting clients outside of the placement will help your students. Thanks for your participation in the students' learning."

I try to keep emails brief knowing how pressed for time field instructors are. I attach handouts and PowerPoint to this email so that if the field instructor wants they can review the material.

This past fall these communications also allowed for some clarity around assignments' expectations. One of the assignments in this class is for students to complete an assessment on a client. The School of Social Work gives the students the Multi-dimensional Functional Assessment. As the name implies this form is quite detailed and all items on the form may not be relevant to the client or the field placement setting. I discuss the information in class, but sometimes students' current anxiety or practice experience impacts their ability to process this information. This semester a field instructor contacted me with questions on the assignment.

"How is my student going to be able to complete all this information, this is a school and we do not collect information on..."

I was able to respond by reassuring the field instructor that we do not expect students to fill in the entire assessment if it is not appropriate. We only expect students to discuss the information and whether or not it is relevant information to collect and if yes, how they would go about collecting it. This rapid response relieved the anxiety of both the student and the field instructor.

The feedback I have received from the field instructors and students is overwhelmingly positive. Field instructors feel more connected to the School and their students' in class learning. I am hoping it also makes the field instructors feel appreciated for their efforts.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE FEINSTEIN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A FIRST EFFORT AT DATA COLLECTION

by Liz Garofalo

Coordinator of Community Service Learning, FSEHD

The success of the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development (FSEHD) in the area of community engagement is grounded in its mission, vision, and strategic plan and attributed to the dedication of faculty to collaborate with the community for the benefit of their college students and the students whom they serve. Whether it is launching a new Bachelor of Arts in Youth Development in partnership with non-profit organizations and other college academic programs, or playing a key role in the RIC/Central Falls Innovation Lab, FSEHD faculty continually strive to develop programs and partnerships that address community needs and that benefit multiple stakeholders in a variety of ways.

FSEHD faculty also increasingly and thoughtfully employ community based research, service learning, and internships that enhance graduate and undergraduate learning, professional development, and provide opportunities for students to be a contributing presence within our state's diverse educational landscape.

In Fall 2013 the FSEHD designed and piloted a preliminary faculty survey to capture community engagement data across all of its programs. Administered in mid-December, it asked respondents to list the community engagement activities in which they involved students in Fall 2013. These activities included service learning, community-based research, community service, internships and practicum. Additionally, respondents were required to provide information about their community/school partners, graduate and undergraduate students involved, and population served. Options to share brief activity descriptions and assessment methods of student learning were also included.

Twenty full-time faculty responded to the survey. Practicum was the most frequently reported engagement activity followed by service learning, community-based research, internships and community service. More undergraduates than

graduates participated in the reported engagement activities which occurred in forty-two schools and twenty-four organizations including non-profits, for-profits, and with on-campus initiatives. The engagement sites were located in eighteen RI cities/towns with Providence, Pawtucket, and Cranston as the most frequently reported. Of the 2,092 children youth and adults served by the activities, the majority were elementary school children. Assessments were reported to have occurred on both the partnership and college student learning levels using a variety of methods including surveys and site visits, case studies, de-briefings with partners, pre and post interviews, written supervisor evaluations, reflections, lesson plans and teacher candidate mini-work samples.

Given the response rate, the survey yielded a *snapshot* of community engagement in the FSEHD as of Fall 2013. The survey has since been expanded to include the extent to which activities connect to the [RI Partnerships for Success Standards](#) and the [Reflective Practitioner Conceptual Framework](#) for undergraduate teacher candidates. Additional adjustments will be made to further refine data collection and companion surveys will be created that elicit information from the community partners and students. This survey provides evidence of FSEHD's commitment to providing and continually refining our community engagement opportunities for our students.



A TRULY INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP: RIC/CENTRAL FALLS INNOVATION LAB

by Carolyn Obel-Omia, Ed.D.

Assistant Professor, Elementary Education

If you have been spending time on the RIC campus in the last twelve months, you probably are aware of the energy building around the RIC/Central Falls Innovation Lab. As the partnership between RIC and the Central Falls school district evolves, ideas are percolating across departments and programs college-wide. For this article, I had a conversation with Julie Horwitz, the coordinator for RIC's side of the Innovation Lab.

The original idea for the collaboration came from Fran Gallo, superintendent of the Central Falls schools. Fran approached Ron Pitt and Sasha Sidorkin, then Dean of the Feinstein School, with a proposal to not only create a partnership between RIC and CFSD, but to make the CFSD a laboratory district for RIC, a site where members of both communities would create innovative, visionary models for the benefit of both communities. While the initial idea was met with a mix of wariness, hope and excitement, as people from RIC and Central Falls began talking with one another about the potential power of a true partnership, hope and excitement began to win out, and the Innovation Lab began to take shape.

The Leadership Team for the Innovation Lab is composed of



Fran Gallo, superintendent of the Central Falls school system, speaks at the one-year celebration for the Innovation Lab. Photos courtesy Julie Horwitz.

members from both RIC and Central Falls, and Julie attributes the growing success of the Innovation Lab to the collaborative nature of the group. This partnership is unique from any other university/school partnerships, in that the power between the two institutions is shared. This is not a takeover of a school district, or a convenient location for business-as-usual clinical experiences to occur; instead this is a place “where new models of learning, teaching and services are developed, piloted, and researched.” The scope of the project, too, is unique to this partnership. The goals of the projects extend beyond classroom walls in both institutions.

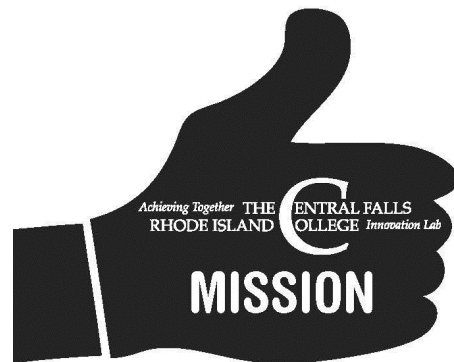
The first year of the Lab has been one of building relationships and trust, from the leadership team, to the many faculty and staff of RIC and Central Falls who are coming together to talk about and begin to create partnerships. People are encouraged to make connections with others who share a common vision. Julie shared the Lab's goal of “trying to break down silos. We're not talking specifically about science education, for example, but we're talking about STEM education across grade levels and schools.” Innovation Lab projects are not organized by grade level, or content areas, but by larger

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domains – STEM, healthy communities, access and retention, and lifelong learning.

While the mission and goals of the Lab provide direction for everyone involved, the conversation about outcomes is ongoing and developing. One visible outcome is the presence of CF students and families at RIC, and the presence of RIC students in the schools of Central Falls. One recent Central Falls high school student and current RIC student addressed the seniors from CFHS, stating “if I can do this, all of you can as well.”

As for the future of the Innovation Lab, it will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of RIC and Central Falls School District. Every year a new memo of agreement between the two parties will be created, ensuring forward movement with space for new, currently unforeseen, directions. In Julie’s words, “If you want to know where we’ll be in five years, come join us. No one knows where we’ll be in five years, but we do know there will be something in five years.” The details may change, but the Lab will exist as a place for the continual development and piloting of sustainable and replicable programs in urban education and healthy community development.



Rhode Island College and the Central Falls School District are partners in Achieving Together: The Central Falls/Rhode Island College Innovation Lab (the Innovation Lab). This unique, first-in-the-nation collaboration has the potential to provide a PK-12 and post-secondary urban education model that offers a new paradigm for state and national replication.

The Innovation Lab presents a unique opportunity -- a catalyst for creating a vibrant shared community where new models of learning, teaching and service are developed, piloted and researched. This mutually beneficial partnership will meet the diverse needs of the residents of Central Falls; advance teaching, learning and research at Rhode Island College; and serve as an innovation laboratory for developing and piloting sustainable and replicable programs in urban education, community development and healthy communities.

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HOW TEACHING TRANSFORMED ME

by Yael J. Avissar, Ph.D.

Professor, Biology

Unlike many of my colleagues, I started out feeling extremely competent and confident. It took me 30 years of teaching to lose that confidence.

To begin with it seemed to be such a simple task. I knew that I wanted to be a teacher, ever since I learned to discern the flicker of understanding in the eye of someone I talked to. I thought that the easiest topics were science and math, since I could clearly see steps that I needed to explain the concepts.

All one needed was a captive audience that would listen. Later one could simply test them, select the grain and discard the chaff. Very much like a germination experiment in the lab. One soaked the seeds, selected the ones that sprouted and discarded the rest. It was easy to predict the outcome – that flicker of understanding in the eyes predicted success. I knew that I was a great teacher. I walked into a class, smiled broadly and opened the floodgates.

Soon after I started teaching I realized my predictions did not always work. Some of the students with the blank stare turned out to be brilliant. Some of the ones with the quick flicker turned out to be lazy and uninspired. Some learned the material easily enough, but never cared to investigate even one step further. Some needed time, some needed examples, others managed fine with formulas.

I clearly needed to refine the input process and to work on the sorting system. For example, surprisingly, some students who struggled with simple multiple choice questions turned out to be intelligent and thoughtful when tested in the essay style. I also discovered that testing is a tool that can be also used while still in the process of teaching.

My students changed too, over time. They became less prepared for studying my subjects, more demanding, less curious, and with shorter attention spans. Education majors question the need for studying science and math, a fact that amazes me. How can anyone doubt that there is no way to



Yael Avissar, Spring 2014

Photo courtesy Professor Avissar.

function in modern society without such knowledge. My students are also much less respectful than they used to be, but instead we often become quite friendly with each other and keep in touch long after they graduate.

I wondered about the background of my students. How well they were trained in science before coming to my classes? What was their home environment like? How many hours of work they worked each week? How good or bad their English was? Did they have any learning problems? Was I actually moving the gears in their heads? Getting to be close and personal with my students had its price too. Rare events of cheating became a personal insult.

Today I have a very different approach from the one I started out with. I have realized that I need much more feedback. I feel that both my students and I should have some tangible

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accomplishment after each meeting. I have broken up my requirement into a large number and a variety of low-stakes assignments. Ideally I would like to have some hands-on assignment incorporated into each lecture, but I do not know how to accomplish that with large classes. To compensate, I am using more and more visuals and less and less text.

The most significant change in my teaching style is the proliferation of writing assignments. My students have to write a short introduction about themselves and attach a picture. I also give a short quiz in the course of each lecture to keep them alert and focused. As I proceed with my slides I have some simple questions popping up on them, one every few minutes. The students need to answer those and hand them in at the end of the lecture. The answers are always short and simple, but the need to write them may help to avoid boredom, and listlessness.

My students prepare lab reports, power point presentations, and research papers in addition to tests. I encourage them to send me drafts, prior to submissions, for feedback. A very popular “writing assignment” is of “cheat sheets” for exams. I allow a handwritten index card that contains formulae, diagrams and conversion factors, in each exam.

I am still trying new ways of delivery, presentation and testing. I found some new ways of getting those seeds to sprout and I am sure that there are many such ways that still elude me.

So, how did I fare as a teacher? I have certainly learned a lot and changed considerably, but I am no longer confident, thirty years later. Or, if I am confident, is about one thing, for sure: seeds that do not germinate immediately can do so under a different set of conditions. It is my job to find out what those conditions are.



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