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# Exploring the Impact of Community Engaged Work Through Arts-Baws Methods with Child, Youth, and Family Studies Practicum Students, Community Partners, and Community Members with Staci B. Martin

Staci B. Martin

Portland State University, mar24@pdx.edu

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Welcome to PDXPLORES, a Portland State Research podcast featuring scholarship innovations and discoveries, pushing the boundaries of knowledge practice and what is possible for the benefit of our communities and the world.

My name is Dr. Stacy B. Martin. I'm an assistant professor of practice at the School of Social Work. I'm a learner, educator and a Fulbright Scholar, a Rotary Peace Fellow, and also Speaking for Ourselves Action Researcher. I am a researcher that researches critical hope and despair, psychosocial and social emotional learning, peace building, and higher education in protracted and conflict contexts. I am a forced migration scholar. I'm a community-based action researcher that is committed to co-creating practical solutions that are culturally responsive and led by, for, and in partnership with the community, especially refugee communities.

Most of my research and scholarly work is international. And in light of that, I've been wanting to find a space and place to engage my PSU practicum Students in research and the CERA, C E R A grant gave me an opportunity to co-research with my students and community partners.

Critical hope theoretical frameworks derive from three disciplines: philosophy, psychology, and education. It draws from the effective and cognitive psychological aspects while creating spaces that support social action and social awakening. Critical hope is a pathological tool or practice of teaching that uses a critical theory lens. In order to address unjust systems through meaningful dialogue and empathic responses.

The role of critical hope can play a central role in education because it acknowledges that there are systems that favor a dominant society at the expense of others. And when we use critical hope as a pedagogical tool, pertinent questions are asked, whose voices are heard in describing the experiences and whose voices are absent? And so the other theoretical concept that I used, particularly in this proposal, this grant, was critical human geography. And basically that theory grounded us with our actual research questions.

The child, youth, and family studies under the, the actual degree, there's a prerequisite that students have to do two practicums. And they can be at different sites, and they could be at one site altogether. But in total they have to do 300 hours. And so it's usually over two terms. And so that's the reason why we have all these students who are doing such good work at these practicum sites, but we're not actually measuring what kind of work and how they're impacting the community. And so that's also the reason why I wrote this proposal in order to get it funded so we can have co-researchers have an

incentive, a financial incentive, to actually do the research and also an ability to express how they impact the community and how the community impacts them.

In order to participate, students need to be in the practicum courses. And so that's actually how they are chosen is if a student is very interested in research, I'll reach out and will contact also the community partner. And the community partner also has an ability to actually join the research. And it doesn't hinder the student from doing the research with us, but it's really encouraged that the community partner actually goes along with us so they can contribute also the impacts that they are making in the community and the impacts that they're making on our students.

The community co-researchers are basically the supervisors of the practicum students. Or it could be participants that are adjunct or adjacent, but they work within the community organization that the practicum student is actually in. So they're all within where the practicum student is based.

I think in general, I've been wanting to partner with my students. One of their tenants is that they have to be change agents, but they aren't able to understand what a change agent is. And so my thinking is reframing it, of "What kind of impacts are you making in your community and in your actual practicum sites?" And so that's what I was thinking about is, "How do I engage my students and also the students that are working with the community partners and how do we engage them in research and understanding that they do make an impact in their communities and that they are change agents, even though they often don't see themselves as that? They see themselves as just doing work. But the kind of work that they're doing is quite meaningful and pretty insightful in what the direction they want to go in their long-term trajectory. So that's one of the reasons why I decided to write a proposal and hopefully wanted it to get funded.

So we just started our research and what I would say is that we have about 16 co-researchers and nine are students, and seven are from the community. Broadly, the community engaged work will take place in schools, both urban and rural, as well as social services, domestic violence shelters, early child development centers, and public policy organizations, as well as correctional facilities, primarily in the metropolitan area and Portland area.

So the research itself is so broad, because of our practicum students have such broad and expanding wants and needs and desires to work with these different populations. And so that's where I'm grateful in the opportunity to be a practicum coordinator is to actually see where all these students are very interested in doing their work. And it's not

work short term. I mean, the practicums are short term. But the work that they want to do, usually when they do these practicums is long term. So it's really nice to see them when they graduate and then they actually follow suit into going into some of these organizations or going on for graduate school and applying the work that they've done in these practicum sites and the impact that they've made on them to future and other endeavors.

I am excited, the work that we're doing of the art projects and the responses. I feel like they're going to be incredibly impactful when we are able to actually showcase them and highlight 'em in the fall.

My vision for this is that we will continue to present and write on things that the community is interested in and that the data that we've collected shows. Because there's lots of little different themes that we could take away from the actual artwork and the artifacts that we're going to create, and also the discussions that we're going to have throughout this process of actually creating and collecting data.

So we're adapting the tenants of photo voice concepts. That is to record, promote, dialogue, and extend findings to the public, but we're not really focusing on photography. Rather we are opening it up to interpretation of participants in whatever art form that they choose. The SOAR approach is really the methodology that we're using. It's co-creating spaces for participants throughout their research process to position themselves as investigators, and together we want to co-construct the findings and implications based on that data that's collected.

It's hoped, by applying a SOAR approach, we can co-create spaces that foreground impacted community's voices and analyzing and determining the implications of the research that ultimately affect their lives. And I wanted to offer an example that's actually not a part of this research. So some BIPOC, EDD graduates, which is what my doctorate is. Uh, we applied this approach because we found that our voices were underrepresented and missing in the literature. And co-writing this article also led me to co-author and edit a book that explores and analyzes the lived experience of scholars and academics from the global south that are located in the global north. And so I think that it's important that we are able to speak for ourselves and to understand that we do have a voice. We're not speaking for the voiceless. I don't particularly like that cliché because everyone has a voice. It's just we don't have the space for it. And so what I try to do in my work is co-create that space that offers a sense of belonging, a sense of bravery, that you can actually speak upon what you feel that's important to you and

what's actually going to change your own life. And so you have that sense of agency and self-determination.

The overall goal of Speaking for Ourselves Action research methodology involves participants as co-researchers so that they are positioned as authorities of their own experience that further develop their awareness of systemic issues to move them to social action. And I think that the biggest thing that to focus on is co researching. That they actually have the ability to analyze, to process, to collect the data. Oftentimes in traditional research and also participatory methodologies is that they just collect the data. But my stance in doing action research, is that the ownership is the community who actually collects it. So they have a right and they have a way and the reason of why they need to actually be a part of the whole process. And that means that it's clearly from the start of the proposal to the end that does the presentations and also the papers that we publish. And so that means that they are actual authors and they will co-present and also co-publish with me.

So communities that are made vulnerable are generally objects of research, observed, surveyed, measured, and commented upon. Speaking for Ourselves is a methodological tool for research in which impacted communities and partners are key interpreters of the research process. And so they have the ability to actually transform and change their lives on their own accord. And so I think it's really important and vital to actually have these folks be able to understand the research process, understand how to analyze code, and to really understand that these different kinds of research that we create and we publish often build public policies that actually may transform their communities and what they're wanting to actually change and transform.

Child Youth and Family Study students will be able to access, analyze, apply, and articulate theoretical knowledge to make professional decisions that improve their lives. They'll focus on development roles and interactions, patterns of children, youth and families within their social systems. They'll understand diversity and recognize oppressive forces that hinder their positive development. They'll demonstrate professional and ethical conduct as well as assume the role of a change agent.

Most of my students don't understand that concept. And so that's one of the things that I really wanted to examine why they're struggling to understand how and what and when they can be a change agent. And what I found out was when I reframed the question to them about "What kind of impact are you making? Small or large in your community that you live in, you work in, you're doing your practicum in?", they were able to answer it very quickly. So it made me think that when we reframe questions and we don't use all these

flower words, like "change agent," um, because what is that? But it's really of how you're impacting your community. And when students are able to actually understand that they impact their community quite a bit and they don't realize it when they recognize it and they're aware of it, then it's just kind of a transformation of their whole way of thinking. And so that's the reason why I wanted to do research around magnifying that thought about what are you impacting, how are you impacted, and what kinds of things can we do at Portland State University to impact the community? Thus the community impacts our students when we're working with them.

Where we claim we are doing participatory research we actually aren't. We are still researchers collecting data, but we're not actually involving the community to understand why this is important to them and actually helping them actually do the research and understand the process of the research. And so, yeah, I do get fired up on it because I want communities to understand they can use this research to defend themselves and they can use this research to actually say, "Hey, we want something to change! And we have data, and it's published in an academic journal to prove that this is wrong." And unfortunately when we don't have that, communities are not able to expound and change the things that are wrong, that are, you know, making them vulnerable and making them at risk communities. And so they do have the opportunity to actually speak for themselves and say, we've already done this research, we know this data in and out, and this is how we're going to defend ourselves.

My first published article had six authors in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and we had five different languages that were actually in the academic paper, which is unheard of. But to actually have them have a book that has a chapter that they wrote that's in their community, that has the languages that they see, and the community is able to see their own language in the so-called academy, is something that is really important to me, that the research reflects who the communities are and also allows them to understand that they need to be a part, not only not objects of research, but they need to be researchers themselves. And so that's one of the reasons why I started this Speaking for Ourselves Action Research in the sense that they are speaking for themselves, they are advocating for themselves. There is agency in that and self-determination. Whereas I think oftentimes traditional research kind of shuts that down and allows the collection of the data, but yet it also stops them from understanding why that research is important to them and how that potentially will transform their lives and change the policies that are actually making these systemic issues that they are fighting against and resisting against.

I gravitate towards Bell Hook's work when she reminds us how art carries a transformative power that can resist, dismantle and change stereotypical ways of thinking. Like my theoretical concept, Critical Hope, the arts can serve as a method between understanding self and self in relation to society. And critical hope in the artifacts that we potentially will create, will support us to examine power dynamics through the context of history, social and political influences. And what we basically want to ask is, "Who has the power and why do they have the power? And why should they have the power and why shouldn't we have the power?"

My master's is in art therapy. My doctor is in education. And I recognize that often we have the ability to express so much more in the arts. And in light of that, the purpose or benefit of this proposal and this research that I'm doing with my students and the community partners is to co-create spaces and places for people to express themselves in a different format so that we can be in the struggle together and tackling hard and social justice issues. And I think that oftentimes, I mean, even with my participants, they were like, "Oh my goodness, you want me to do something artistic? I'm not artistic?" And I even think I'm not artistic and yet my degree and my background is all based in art. And so I think it's actually how society sees what is art and how they define what is art. And I think that's where we need to push back on that art is very subjective and who gets to define that and who has the power to define that?

The research is really understanding that we all are artists. And it's really who has the power to define financially what's the worth of this artwork. But my hope is to actually showcase the community partners of the work that they're doing and also showcasing the work that our students are doing. And so in light of that, I think that regardless of the artwork that they do, I think that just having something that shows their ability to express themselves in all different ways. I said to them, you can do photography, you can do music, you can do dance, you can do any video, you could do baking, or sports. I mean, this is something, the arts is very, all-encompassing and really quite fantastic if you think about it, of, of the expansive things that you could do. But it's just something that you have the ability to express yourself and really get on the idea of honing in on the questions and really understanding and having some kind of meaningful engagement that you are working with your community and also working with the actual questions that I'm asking to do.

Art can be very therapeutic. I mean, that's the reason why I went into my master's. And I also feel like art can be an act of resistance, an act of also transformation. And a lot of communities use art and apply art in the most radical ways that really show what they are challenging, resisting against, and trying to dismantle. We see it in communities. We

also see it with children and youth. And, in fact, I've developed a psychosocial peace building educational program in South Africa, Nepal, Jamaica, and Kenya, and the basis is art. It's all art. It's storytelling. It's book making. It's everything that allows a child and a youth to actually express themselves when they're talking about something that's really pretty awful that's occurring in their lives. Or it could be very hopeful. But I think that the arts itself is something that we neglect often when we think about therapeutic value, and yet we use it all the time in order for us to heal.

My name is Dr. Stacy B. Martin and I'm Assistant Professor of Practice in the School of Social Work. I'm a forced migration scholar. My primary goal is to co-create spaces and places for impacted communities to engage in research, understand why research is needed, and ultimately how we can produce it together to create actionable and culturally responsive solutions.

Thank you for listening to PDXPLORES. If you liked what you heard on this episode, please read and follow the show anywhere you get your podcasts.