Building A Learning Community For Fieldwork Students: A Case Study Example

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Abstract

Many university recreation faculties would agree that the fieldwork experience is one of the most important steps in professional preparation. In addition, quality fieldwork placement can be a challenge. In the rural community where Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) is located there is a limited number of quality fieldwork sites where students can continue to integrate learning through the guided application of academic foundations in a professional setting. This article describes a case study of building a fieldwork site based on Shapiro and Levin's (1999) learning community initiatives. A successful partnership was implemented between the Department of Health Education and Recreation at SIUC and the Union County Housing Authority. In accordance with this arrangement, fieldwork students assumed full responsibility as staff for after school and summer recreation programs that serve at-risk youth. A recreation graduate student assumed responsibility for fieldwork supervision. Information and feedback from student input and faculty observations provide a basis for dialog about recreation pedagogy and professional preparation.

Keywords: fieldwork supervisor, fieldwork agency, professional preparation, collaboration, partnership

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Introduction

Recreation is an applied field. As educators, we are charged with the challenging task of both preparing students for life and developing in our students the technical skills necessary to work in the recreation field. A critical piece of this challenge is the field-work experience because it is the bridge for assisting students to hone application skills they have begun to develop through class work and to make the satisfactory transition from the classroom to the work setting (Jewell, 1989). It is also the bridge for helping students to transition from a student identity to that of an emerging recreation professional.

The philosophy of John Dewey has served as a cornerstone for the experiential component of our curriculums. Decades ago Dewey (1916) stated, there is a danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience, and that the academic environment "is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity"(p. 22). Dewey believed that it was important for schools to not leave student learning outside the classroom setting to chance but instead to guide the outcomes derived from conjoint activities. He states, "any environment is a chance environment so far as its educative influence is concerned unless it has been deliberately regulated with reference to its educative effect" (1916, p.18). Dewey's concern is relevant to recreation pedagogy issues today. In particular, these issues relate to how faculty can regulate the educative effect of student fieldwork experiences to minimize the potential of fieldwork sites to be a chance academic environment.

The fieldwork experience serves to expand one's knowledge beyond the classroom setting. Alexander (1982) describes the student teaching experience in terms that would be appropriate for describing the fieldwork experience: "It is a model, a plan, a medium, a happening, and a professional milestone in the lives of students who learn and grow through their involvement" (p. 59). Fieldwork provides an opportunity to observe, to participate, and perform independently in a supportive environment. According to Reynolds and O'Morrow (1985) there are four reasons for the fieldwork experience: 1) to contribute to the student's identification with the profession as a whole; 2) to contribute to the student's self-awareness; 3) to facilitate the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in class; and 4) to develop the student's skill on the level of beginning competencies.

Fieldwork is implemented as a partnership between the academic unit of a university and the recreation delivery system. As such, regulation of the student experience is complex. Although the university provides controls that include guidelines, procedures, and evaluation; fieldwork sites and supervisors are responsible for providing experience and supervision. Quality control of fieldwork sites and their educative effect by recreation departments can be an ongoing dilemma because there are two operating authorities. Sometimes there is a tension between university expectations for student learning and an agency's ability to deliver quality supervision and experiences. The university is

expected to successfully insure the accomplishment of the four purposes of fieldwork cited in the previous paragraph but control of insuring these purposes rests primarily with the fieldwork site.

This article is not written to suggest that agency provided experience and supervision is always deficient: many agencies do a wonderful job of facilitating student development. There are a number of reasons, however, why it is sometimes difficult for agencies to ensure the type of student learning the fieldwork experience is intended to provide. Agency staff may have insufficient time to dedicate to student learning. Students may be placed in primarily observational or support roles that do not call upon them to sufficiently apply recreation skills. Learning opportunities may not materialize because of low program enrollment or insufficient resources. This can be a particularly salient issue for fieldwork programs where the university is located in a rural area and serving agencies tend to be small. Many of these reasons however, revolve around the role performed by the agency fieldwork supervisor. The fieldwork supervisor interprets, regulates, and facilitates the student experience. To the degree to which the supervisor is not able to perform these functions, the quality of fieldwork experience for the student can be compromised.

The focus of this article is a case study of an attempt by the Health Education and Recreation Department at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) – to grapple with fieldwork issues and develop an alternative response to organizing fieldwork through the use of a learning community. This article will outline how the fieldwork program is organized at SIUC and areas of concern that faculty wanted to address; explain what a learning community is and how this model of learning was used to shape a fieldwork environment, and finally discuss student response to and faculty observation of the learning community model as an option for fieldwork delivery.

The SIUC undergraduate catalog describes fieldwork as "supervised leadership experiences in a public or private recreation setting". All recreation majors must complete two, two credit hour fieldworks prior to a one semester, twelve credit hour culminating internship experience. Before students can register for fieldwork they must first complete five pre-requisite foundation courses: 1) Introduction to Leisure Services which orients the students to the idea of using recreation and leisure as a social tool to build individual life skills and shape individual and collective behaviors; 2) Leadership in Recreation which orients students to leadership theories and effective leadership techniques for individuals and groups; 3) Program Design and Group Dynamics which orients students to the process of programming including developing an understanding of the environment that precipitates program need, assessing needs, designing program services, implementing and delivering program services, and finally, evaluating programs for effectiveness; 4) Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities which orients the students to the types of services available to special populations; and 5) Pre-Practicum which orients the students to the responsibility and opportunity of fieldwork experience within the field of recreation. These courses are intended to provide students with the

academic foundation needed to have a successful fieldwork experience. Additionally, these courses provide opportunities for relationship building between students and teachers and the establishment of a common ground from which to fuel the fieldwork experience. Based on student input and faculty observation at SIUC, four main areas of concern were identified regarding the fieldwork experience.

First, there is sometimes only limited connection to the foundation programming course in many of the fieldwork settings. As stated in the previous paragraph, all recreation majors are required to take an intensive program design course as part of the prerequisite foundation course series. This course culminates with an extensive service learning project that requires teams of students to produce actual special events at a university family housing complex. Recreation students therefore go into their fieldwork setting with understanding of and rudimentary experience with the programming process. Ideally, subsequent fieldwork should provide developmental opportunities, continuing integrated learning through the guided application of academic foundations in a professional setting. However, because SIUC is located in a rural area, there are not a large number of fieldwork sites that provide students with the opportunity to intensively practice programming and build competence with the outcome based programming model they are introduced to in the programming foundation course.

Second, there is an uneven quality of fieldwork experience. Ideally fieldwork opportunities provide students with a consistent progression of responsibility and autonomy from classroom learning to professional independence. Some fieldwork experiences as reported by students were not providing students with sufficient responsibility or autonomy to maximize the development of their skills particularly in the area of programming. Students complained of busywork, nonessential functions, and experiences that were primarily observational in nature. Because the fieldwork setting is a chance academic environment the learning that takes place often cannot be controlled.

Third, there is a concern about the uneven quality of supervision. Research suggests that quality supervision is a key component of a positive fieldwork experience (Jewell, 1989). Unfortunately, not all fieldwork sites have supervisors with the time or willingness to mentor students adequately through the development and application of recreation skills.

Fourth, is the issue of isolation of some fieldwork students. Some students go through the fieldwork experience in isolated settings, without the benefit of a peer support group or connection to the university community other than through fieldwork reports and site visitations. Although the fieldwork supervisor may be available to talk, the student may want to communicate with a fellow student when issues or concerns arise. Because you are sometimes dealing with small agencies and with limited opportunities for collegiality to develop at fieldwork sites, some students feel the absence of a cohort group. Collaboration is interrupted and shared learning limited.

Understanding Learning Communities

According to Cross (1998) learning communities are defined as groups of people engaged in intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning. Learning communities are generated from purposefully restructured curricula where course work is linked so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning and an increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, Smith & Leigh, 1990). Learning communities are more student-centered with students and teachers sharing responsibility for teaching and learning (Shapiro & Levin, 1999).

Learning communities provide the opportunities for continued feedback from peers and teachers (Shapiro & Levin). Additionally, learning communities are collaborative and active approaches to learning. Gabelnick, MacGregor, and Smith (1990) emphasize that learning communities are usually thematic and frequently incorporate team teaching. According to Shapiro and Levin (1999) learning community initiatives share a number of basic characteristics:

1. organizing students and faculty into smaller groups;

2. encouraging integration of the curriculum;

3. helping students establish academic and social support networks;

4. providing a setting for students to be socialized to the expectations of the profession;

5. bringing faculty together in more meaningful ways;

6. focusing faculty and student on learning outcomes;

7. providing a setting for community-based delivery of academic support programs; and

8. offering a critical lens for examining the fieldwork experience.

Based on a review of related literature (Senge, 1990; Cross, 1998; Shapiro & Levin, 1999; Scardamal & Bereiter, 1994; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, Smith & Leigh, 1990) four features are important when developing a learning community: 1) *learning*, 2) *community*, 3) *leadership*, and 4) *culture of collaboration*. A combination of teaching and *learning* takes place, not just teaching, because learning focuses students on process as well as content and product. Because of the collaborative environment fostered by a community of learning, students share responsibility for their learning. *Community* is inclusive of community members, teachers and students, where teaching and learning takes place separately as individuals, and together as one body vested in a common goal. Even though the primary focus of relationship building in a learning community is between a small group of students and faculty, there is also the possibility that a

relationship or bond may develop between the students and the community they work with. *Leadership* implies leaders as teachers, mentors and stewards who lead collaboratively. A learning community leader should have the skills and ability to involve all learning community members in the learning process. *Culture of collaboration* refers to a mutually beneficial relationship where students and teachers work together toward common goals through shared responsibility for learning. The defining quality of a learning community as opposed to individual pursuit of knowledge is that there is a culture of learning in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding (Scardamal & Bereiter, 1994).

According to Riley, Skalko, McChesney, and Glascoff (1999), "within the realm of academia, putting 'theory into practice' often proves to be a difficult task. An even greater challenge is creating opportunities to actually experience cultural diversity and cross-generation differences" (p. 56). Valerius, Keller, Doyle, and Collins (1998) suggest that, to truly engage the student in higher-order learning experiences, teachers may have to get students out of the confines of the classroom and into the community. Freire (1993) postulates that educators need to move away from passive knowledge for its own sake, toward learning that puts teacher, student and the community together. According to Kinsley, (1994) "young people should become involved in their communities in an effort to both understand their rights as citizens and to have the positive self reinforcing experience of meeting their responsibilities as citizens.

A positive outcome of learning communities according to Shapiro and Levin (1999) is that student interaction with peers reinforces the attitudes, values, and behaviors deemed important for success after college. Another positive outcome of the learning community concept is that students learn from each other as well as the teacher. To some extent, if we believe that "knowledge is socially constructed rather than discovered, then we possibly also believe that knowledge is maintained not by examining the world but by negotiating with one another in communities of knowledgeable peers" (Bruffee, 1995, p. 5). According to Cross (1998) in the nonfoundational view of knowledge, a community of learners is not only advantageous, it is necessary, because people construct knowledge by working together, not just cooperatively and collaborative but interdependently, i.e. fieldwork. Consequently, students learn how education provided within the theoretical framework can be applied to specific situations. Simply stated, students relate information from their courses to fieldwork situations.

Creating a Learning Community as a Response to Fieldwork Concerns

The creation of a deliberately regulated learning community as described by Dewey was deemed to be one way to appropriately respond to the fieldwork issues and concerns identified at SIUC. The learning community fieldwork model was envisioned in the following way:

1) The fieldwork experience would complement and reinforce the principles of program planning laid out in the Program Design and Group Dynamics course. It would

be a purposefully structured experience linking together course work and fieldwork application so that students would find coherence between what they learned and what they were required to do. Teaching materials utilized in the course would be carried into the fieldwork site. Outcome based programming which was introduced in the program design class would form the basis of fieldwork site programming.

2) The fieldwork environment would provide students with the opportunity to grow from the level of programming developed in their program design class and be empowered to maximize this growth. Empowerment as a concept has been derived from Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and is premised on two conditions: self-efficacy (ability to produce outcomes) and locus of control (degree of control of outcomes). Bandura's social cognitive theory and empowerment operationalized as self-efficacy and locus of control has since been extensively elaborated in management literature (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Gecas, 1989; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Gist, 1987; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Wood, 1990; Wood, Bandura, & Bailey, 1990; Wood & Bandura, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989). This conceptualization of empowerment as applied to the fieldwork environment would be premised on two site conditions: a sufficient level of responsibility to improve ability, and student control of decisions to motivate learning.

3) Careful and guided supervision of the fieldwork experience would be provided with university faculty having a continuing role in student education. It was deemed that quality supervision at the fieldwork site would be most effectively facilitated with a graduate student supervisor at the helm to both supervise students and mediate connection to university faculty. Under the direction of faculty, a graduate student supervisor would be well placed to reinforce student learning that began in the classroom. In conjunction, the graduate student would be able to create a student centered learning environment at the fieldwork site by guiding and structuring learning situations to best promote student growth.

4) Student isolation would be eliminated at a site where fieldwork students could work together collaboratively to program recreation opportunities. A carefully cultivated learning community of students and faculty (directly through the graduate student supervisor and indirectly through faculty advisement of the graduate student and occasional involvement of faculty member with fieldwork students during their onsite activities) would provide a supportive peer group and cooperative student growth and learning.

Building the Learning Community Site

The Department of Health Education and Recreation at SIUC was approached by the social service coordinator at Union County Housing Authority about the possibility of using fieldwork students to provide recreation opportunities. This request provided the chance to create a controlled fieldwork site organized in accordance with learning community characteristics as described Shapiro and Levin (1999). A successful collaboration was initiated between the Department of Health Education and Recreation and the

Housing Authority, providing a wonderful setting for the community-based delivery of an academic support program (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #7). In accordance with this arrangement, fieldwork students assume full responsibility as staff for after school and summer recreation programs that serve at-risk youth at several Union County Public Housing sites. Both the fieldwork setting and the level of responsibility assumed by students, socialize students to the expectations of what it means to be a professional in the field (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #4). Students are closely supervised by a recreation graduate student who is contracted and funded by the Union County Housing Authority for the specific purpose of training and overseeing fieldwork students in the planning and operation of recreation services. Students work in site teams and are responsible for planning, implementing, promoting, conducting, and evaluating after school or summer recreation programs. Additionally, each student is responsible for planning, conducting, and promoting one special event each semester in collaboration with another fieldwork student. Students in the fall and spring semester are required to work an after school program two days a week for fifteen weeks plus additional time for training and special event production. Students in the summer semester are required to work every weekday afternoon for six weeks plus additional time for training and special event production.

This program is currently in its fifth semester of operation. Seven to ten fieldwork students have been involved each fall/spring semester with three to four fieldwork students participating each summer. The number of sites programmed expands and contracts depending upon the number of fieldwork students. The two largest housing authority properties are the principle programming sites. Students work in teams of three or four to program each site. Recreation services are provided to a third smaller property with primarily Hispanic residents when there are a sufficient number of fieldwork students. Therapeutic Recreation students have had the additional option to program at the Housing Authority Senior Citizen high rise.

The primary function of the graduate student supervisor is to closely facilitate the growth and learning of fieldwork students. Students participate in two days of staff training organized by the graduate student at the beginning of each semester. Even though students have full responsibility for program planning and operation, it is done under the careful supervision of the graduate assistant. Student teams interact daily with the graduate student who: 1) helps students to link the fieldwork experience to materials learned in recreation foundation courses listed earlier; 2) guides and advises students through all steps of the programming process; and 3) facilitates daily staff meetings and interactions. The graduate student additionally works with students to help them become comfortable and skilled with the outcome-oriented programming they were introduced to in the foundation Program Design course (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #2). Even though the recreation graduate student works in close association with fieldwork students on a daily basis, the graduate student also works in close association with a department faculty member in terms of planning staff training and conducting day-to-day operations. Additionally, the department faculty member interacts with the

graduate assistant and students during staff training and during periodic visits to the program sites (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #5).

Fieldwork students at these sites are working with an at-risk youth population and outcome based programming is used to guide intervention strategies and address problem behaviors of at-risk youth. During staff training, fieldwork students develop three to four program goals that address social issues that they are confronting at the housing site. Each program goal is emphasized for a period of three to four weeks of the semester. Each is intended to serve as a building block for the next unit. For example, one semester students developed the following goals: communication, decision-making, goal-setting, then, conflict resolution. Program activities were designed to reinforce the development and application of these program goals by the youth population being served (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #6).

Student site teams form the small group operational basis of the learning community (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #1) and operate in a collaborative context (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #3). Students take turns being responsible for program plans and then execute jointly. Students work in pairs planning monthly special events but all team members staff each event. Daily meetings provide opportunity for shared planning, knowledge and support (Shapiro and Levin learning community characteristic #8).

Student Input and Faculty Observation

The use of a deliberately regulated model (learning community) as the basis for structuring and organizing the Union County experience has resulted in a fieldwork academic environment that both incorporates learning community characteristics and addresses many of the concerns and issues that were the impetus for its development. Fieldwork participants from the fall 2000, spring 2001, and fall 2001 semesters were asked to anonymously answer open-ended questions that required them to comment on various aspects of their Union County fieldwork experience. Four of these questions were intended to secure student input and perspective on the learning community experience. A total of 22 students completed the qualitative questions. Answers to these four questions were organized into the salient categories/themes of responses that emerged from the data. These salient categories/themes have been reported in the following section with representative student comments for categories/themes incorporated in the data narrative. Student observations in large part have corroborated the intent, function, and strengths of the controlled learning community environment.

Students were asked if the Union County (U.C.) fieldwork experience enabled them to draw connections between classroom learning and what they will do as a professional in the field. *All students responded in the affirmative.* One student's representative comment:

I feel as if I learned more at Union County than in class. At U.C., it gave me a chance to do what we learned in class, and put it into effect every day. It provided you with real experiences, and how to fix things that go wrong. Rec 302 (the foundation program design course) was beneficial to give you basic knowledge, but U.C. is putting it into action.

Most students focused on the direct connection between what they learned in the programming class and what they were called upon to do at the programming site. Following is a representative student observation: "With the Anna site, it was totally programming and trying to meet everyone's needs. Everything I learned in programming #302 I used. Promotion, news releases, thank you letters, program plan, youth at risk stuff such as BBP (benefits based programming)". One student drew connection to both the leadership and programming foundation recreation classes: "in classes we learned things such as leadership styles, teamwork skills, writing programs and evaluations and we actually get to use these skills we learn in class at the Anna fieldwork site". Another student drew connection to writing skills: "it has helped me with writing goals and objectives. Plus, it has helped me with writing and thinking of program plans."

Quality of fieldwork experience. Student reaction to the Union County fieldwork learning community initiative has been positive and *all students responded affirmatively* to a question asking if Union County was a quality fieldwork experience. One student commented. "I feel that it is a high quality fieldwork. You learn so much and come out of the site with skills you never had. It was a great experience with lots of responsibility, but it's worth goes far beyond." Students attributed the worth of the experience to several main factors. The factor most frequently cited by students was the degree of responsibility they were given in the fieldwork setting primary of which is responsibility. One student's representative observation: "we are in charge of running an after school program that's similar to positions you might actually hold after school. We are learning to write program plans and evaluations. We're learning teamwork skills and learning to handle children in group activities." One student emphasized: "you are the staff, not just volunteering or following other staff". Another student commented, "workers are given the opportunity to make decisions".

A second major factor that contributed to student perception of the Union County fieldwork as a quality experience is the fact that students are working with an at-risk youth population. Student responses reflect challenge, commitment, and pride. Many similarly commented that "working with the population of kids itself is a challenge". Many students were agreed in their feelings that "these kids are some of the hardest to work with, but you can really see the difference that you make with them".

A third factor that multiple students noted as contributing to the quality of the fieldwork experience was its organization. This organization reflects the benefits of being a deliberately regulated learning environment. One student's representative comment, "we definitely earn our A by the quality of work we do and learn". A second student wrote: "the Union County fieldwork is much more organized than my first field-

work. Everything from the organization to the course work is much more structured". A third student observed: "it is a well organized program that requires a lot but has just as much to offer".

Quality of supervision. Supervision is the key component of structuring this fieldwork as a controlled environment experience. Because the supervisor is a graduate assistant who functions as an onsite faculty member, and because the graduate assistant as supervisor controls the content and quality of this fieldwork experience, characteristics that are important to learning community functioning such as integration with curriculum, facilitation of a social support network, directed focus on learning outcomes, and the socialization of students to professional expectations can be assured. Students were asked if the Union County fieldwork provided them with quality supervision. *All students were positive in their response.* Following are representative comments. One student focused on supervisor assistance: "I had a great supervisor. He would always tell us what we need to improve or not. He always asked if there was anything we needed or if he could help out. Plus, he let us learn from our mistakes which was good." Another student addressed the outcome orientation of the supervisor: "(She) is a great supervisor. She is very goal-oriented and focused on helping us achieve as much as we can during this fieldwork experience." The following quote is representative of student appreciation of the structure that the supervisor built into the program: "Any questions we had were answered quickly and accurately. (The supervisor) was there to help if a staff member was unable to attend. We were closely guided the first few weeks to get a feel for the site." One student commented about the individual direction that was provided students: "(The supervisor) was very helpful with making sure all of my goals and objectives got accomplished. He also gave us just the right amount of supervision." Another student discussed the supervisor's genuine concern:" (The supervisor) was always there to help out. He did not look over our shoulder all of the time, but was there when we had questions or problems. He genuinely cared about our experience and what we were learning."

Collaborative learning community. An important trait of learning communities that is critical to cultivate is the community of learning itself. In order for a learning community to function, social support and interaction among community members must be facilitated, and learning must take place through collaborative process. The Union County fieldwork was structured so that a community for learning was set in place. Teams of fieldwork students under the direction of the graduate student work together at a specific public housing site to produce a recreation product.

Students were asked to comment on how working collaboratively with other fieldwork students impacted their fieldwork learning experience. *All students were very positive about being able to collaboratively develop programs.* Following is a representative comment:

I really enjoyed working with the other students. I learned a lot from their ideas. All of our programs were formed by all of us, which made it easier

and made the programs more diverse. The others had worked in this type of setting before which made it good for me because I could ask questions.

Students remarked how the collaborative environment helped to foster collaborative skills. Following is a representative comment: "It helped to develop my teamwork skills. This includes such things as giving tasks to team members and trust that they will do a good job, or brainstorming with each other to develop program activities, crafts, etc." One student talked about how the experience fostered responsibility and a sense of camaraderie with group members: "You learn to be dependable so staff members can count on you. You learn to share responsibilities so one person doesn't get over-burdened. You have a sense of comfort when working with other children doing the same thing." One student discussed developing an attitude of professionalism with fellow co-workers: "I loved working together as a team because that way you get feedback on your ideas and you get to give feedback. I also learned that even if you don't get along with one student it's still nice to act professional - to act civil while working together."

Students in the collaborative learning community question identified one problem. Several students commented that some of the staff were not "pulling their own weight". This is a problem that often arises when groups of students work together. Because the graduate student has the benefit of being on site and in a position to observe group dynamics closely, and additionally controls fifty percent of the fieldwork experience grade, unequal effort on the part of fieldwork students can be somewhat monitored and controlled. The sense of responsibility that most of the fieldwork students feel towards the youth and their program also help to mediate the problem. The following comment is representative: "You learn to work with others and their style of work, leadership, and group interaction. Sometimes it was hard to work with the ones that wouldn't pull their own weight, but it just made you want to work harder, so that you wouldn't let down the kids." As a result of this feedback, however, methods are being considered which will incorporate student peer evaluation into fieldwork performance assessment at Union County learning community sites.

Unanticipated Outcomes of Building a Learning Community

The original scope of the learning community intended with this initiative was the relationship among the housing site students, the graduate assistant, and the faculty member overseeing the effort. In the five semesters that this program has operated, however, the *community* associated with this learning effort has grown. There has been the development of more intensive and extensive community linkages than originally envisioned. Students and faculty have and continue to establish connections to a broader community of individuals and organizations and deepen their sense of connection to housing authority constituents. These expanding communities are described.

Student connection to public housing community. In the course of the fieldwork, students develop a real attachment to the youth they work with and feel that they make a difference. In the four complete semesters that the program has operated, at least one

student each semester has returned to do a second fieldwork/independent study at one of the public housing sites.

Expanding community of shared learning. Students who do a second fieldwork/ independent study assume the responsibility of being a recreation site supervisor. They share programming experiences and knowledge with first time fieldwork students and help guide them through the programming process. An additional layer of peer support and collaboration has therefore emerged. Originally the learning community was established to have three layers: student (learning cohort) —> graduate assistant (on site faculty representative) —> tenure track faculty member (university based). A new model has now emerged: student (learning cohort) —> student supervisor (expanded learning cohort) —> graduate assistant (on site faculty representative) —> tenure track faculty member (university based). Although these layers are depicted in a linear fashion, they are dynamic with each component engaged in significant interaction with all others.

Interdisciplinary level. The expansion of this fieldwork site to a student staffed multi-disciplinary approach to community development is in the discussion stage. Opportunities for fieldwork, internship, and applied research collaboration with social work, physical education, and health education department at SIUC are being considered.

Institutional level of community. Initially this initiative was intended to be a fieldwork partnership between the Health Education and Recreation Department and the Union County Housing Authority. This relationship has developed into a much richer association with university/housing authority collaboration on a number of other initiatives including: a) collaborative securement of an Illinois Campus Compact grant to fund graduate assistant and fieldwork student efforts to create tenant councils at public housing sites and implement resident directed community service initiatives; b) continuing efforts to secure additional collaborative funding for expanded at risk youth programs and tenant council service initiatives; and c) co-presentation of a workshop at the March 2000 Illinois Rural Health Association annual conference on outcome based recreation programming for at-risk rural youth populations by the faculty member, graduate assistant, and housing authority social service advisor affiliated with this initiative. With these initiatives a local community organization is partnering with the Department of Health Education and Recreation in community development and at the same time involving students in the process of civic engagement.

Conclusion

This article has presented a case study of how one department has utilized a learning community model to address fieldwork concerns and issues. These concerns and issues centered around fieldwork experiences sometimes having only limited connection to the foundation programming course, uneven quality of fieldwork experiences, uneven quality of fieldwork supervision, and the isolation of fieldwork students at some of the fieldwork sites. Starting with the objective of a deliberately regulated fieldwork

environment as first described by Dewey, learning community characteristics centered around small group, collaborative, and outcome focused learning were used to shape a fieldwork experience that would: 1) integrate the principles of program planning learned in the foundation programming class with onsite application, 2) furnish students with a level of program responsibility and control that would facilitate continued learning, 3) have a graduate assistant function as an on site faculty member to direct the content and quality of the fieldwork experience, and 4) provide a supportive peer group and cooperative learning environment. The characteristics of learning community initiatives outlined by Shapiro and Levin (1999) provided the organizing structure for the following fieldwork experience:

1. *Organizing students and faculty into smaller groups* - teams of 3-4 fieldwork students and a graduate assistant form the basis for the learning community at each Union County Public Housing site. A faculty member works in conjunction with the graduate assistant and student teams. Sites additionally often include a student supervisor who provides additional peer support and guidance.

2. *Encouraging integration of the curriculum* - the graduate assistant functions as both teacher and supervisor helping students to draw from materials learned in primarily programming and leadership foundation courses and guiding them through the outcome-based programming process.

3. *Helping students establish academic and social support networks* - site teams work collaboratively to plan and conduct recreation programs establishing a system of support at each public housing site.

4. *Providing a setting for students to be socialized to the expectations of the profession* - students assume full responsibility for staffing after school and summer recreation programs under the guidance of the graduate assistant. This level of responsibility helps socialize students to the expectations of what it means to be a professional in the field.

5. *Bringing faculty together in more meaning ways* - in the course of the five semesters this program has been in operation, faculty and students have come together in mutually beneficial ways through the development of both intensive and extensive community links to the learning community.

6. *Focusing faculty and student on learning outcomes* - fieldwork students at these sites are working with an at-risk youth population. Outcome-based programming competencies form the basis of learning outcomes as students use recreation as a social tool to build life skills and positive social behaviors in youth.

7. *Providing a setting for community-based delivery of academic support programs* - the success of this initiative has been dependent upon the relationship established between the Department of Health Education and Recreation and Union County

Housing Authority, and the willingness of the housing authority to fund both a graduate assistant and operational costs for the after school and summer recreation programs.

8. *Offering a critical lens for examining the fieldwork experience* - the learning community collaboration and connection among students, student supervisor, graduate student, faculty member, and community at large offers a unique setting and mutually beneficial experience for the fieldwork students and the public housing community.

The case study describes the experience of one recreation department that utilized a learning community model to structure student fieldwork experiences. This case study was not intended to present this model as superior to the practice of singly deploying students to a fieldwork site, which is common to most fieldwork programs. This model does however, have exciting potential to encourage dialogue about the role that a recreation department can play in the delivery of the fieldwork experience.

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