



A Learning Journey II: Learned Course Maps as a Basis to Explore How Students Learned Community Psychology Practice Competencies in a Community Coalition Building Course

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Abstract

This paper presents an illustrative case study of how students learned community psychology practice competencies. Utilizing course mapping, focus groups, and reflective writing, students and faculty coded, analyzed and interpreted student data to better understand learning activities and processes which contributed to learning community psychology practice competencies in a coalition building course. A community coalition simulation and group work related to the final project emerged as two student learning activities that were found by students to contribute meaningfully to their learning three community psychology practice competencies: (1) Ecological perspectives, (2) community partnership and inclusion and (3) collaboration and coalition development. The instructor's modeling community psychology practice competency skills was also reported by students to facilitate their learning.

Key Words: Student Empowerment, Curriculum Mapping, Community Psychology Practice Competencies, Community Psychology Graduate Training, Collaboration and Coalition Building

In the Fall 2012 issue of the *The Community Psychologist (TCP)*, a draft of competencies for community psychology (CP) practice was shared with the membership of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) (SCRA, 2012). One of the purposes of articulating CP practice competencies is to promote the further development of educational and professional training programs. While there are legitimate fears, as in other professions (e.g., therapy or social work), that the competencies could be developed into rigid accreditation or licensing standards, this is not the stated intent of the competencies for CP practice: "These competencies are *not* intended as standards for accrediting programs or licensing individuals. Instead, they provide a common framework for the discussion of skills involved in CP practice, and how those skills can be learned (SCRA, 2012, p. 9)." One of the immediate benefits for teachers of CP practice is a better ability to articulate a range of competencies students can develop in CP as well as the program opportunities and limitations to learn various CP practice competencies.

SCRA also proposed three categories to describe the level of training to serve as a framework for graduate programs to more systematically describe opportunities for students to learn CP practice (Kloos, 2010):

- *Exposure*: In core community courses, all students learn about the value of this competency and how it can be applied in community psychology practice.
- *Experience*: In selected courses, including supervised practical/fieldwork, students can

choose to gain supervised practice in performing tasks and actions related to the competency.

- *Expertise*: Upper level students can choose competencies in which to develop further experience and attain a higher level of expertise. This might involve several field experiences over several terms or years. Postgraduate experiences and continuing education allow for further development of expertise in specific competencies (SCRA, 2012, p. 9).

Through articulating the *Level of Training*, graduate programs can be more specific in communicating with students about the depth of training they will receive in various courses or in an overall program.

In training students to develop CP practice competencies, understanding the link between training (academic and field-based), student learning, and student outcomes is a challenging prospect. Yet, there are descriptive and applied research methods available to study these relationships. One descriptive tool, curriculum mapping, has been used widely in higher education as a means of studying learning from a programmatic perspective. Curriculum mapping is a process of developing a graphic representation to illustrate the relationships between program goals, objectives, student learning activities and outcomes, and, instructional activities (Cuevas, Matveev, & Miller, 2010). The curriculum map serves as a tool to conceptualize a program's curriculum as an interrelated system. While traditionally used as a tool to study program objectives, curriculum mapping can also be used to map how courses in a curriculum align with the CP practice competencies and incorporate *Levels of Training* (Kloos, 2010) for courses within a

curriculum. An additional goal of the curriculum mapping process is to better understand the relationship between what faculty intend students to learn (i.e., declared curriculum), what is presented (i.e., taught curriculum), and what students learn (i.e., learned curriculum) (Harden, 2001). Through creating *Declared* and *Learned* course maps, faculty and students can construct a comprehensive curriculum map of how CP practice competencies are taught and learned in their program.

Another consideration in studying student learning is how to conceptualize and measure the acquisition of knowledge. Habermas (1971) has articulated three types of knowledge applicable to the current discussion. Communicative knowledge focuses on understanding social codes of accepted behaviors and beliefs which often vary across social settings and includes both the ability to understand and communicate (e.g., developing collaboration skills applicable to community based work). Instrumental knowledge is utilized to act effectively in social settings and events to achieve observable results (e.g., writing a grant application and receiving funding). Emancipatory knowledge is grounded in critical reflection on the relationship between self and sociopolitical environments. The element of social change in which individuals are able to overcome oppression through social action is at the heart of emancipatory knowledge (e.g., empowerment). While evidence of communicative knowledge can be assessed by experts in the field and instrumental knowledge can be assessed through objective evaluation methods, emancipatory knowledge is best assessed through the inclusion of the learner as a collaborative researcher. And, descriptive methods, such as interviews, journaling and conceptual mapping, are appropriate for studying emancipatory learning within the classroom and in the context of community based projects that expand beyond the classroom (Cranton & Hogan, 2012).

The current paper utilizes descriptive methods consistent with evaluating transformative learning (Cranton & Hogan, 2012) to explore how students reported learning CP practice competencies in a Community Coalition Building in Community Practice course in the Applied Community Psychology (ACP) Specialization at Antioch University Los Angeles (AULA).

ACP Specialization Pedagogy and Level of Training through Curricula

The program pedagogy of the ACP Specialization is grounded in student empowerment which has shaped the structure of curricula for students to develop *Experience* (Kloos, 2010) with selected CP practice competencies. Working in peer groups, students gain supervised practice experience performing actions, tasks and activities related CP practice competencies. *ACP Student Empowerment* has been defined based on Maton's (2008) work to provide students with the

underlying program delivery framework throughout the curriculum and has also guided the design of this study through including students as co-researchers to explore their learning process (Taylor & Sarkisian, 2011):

A participatory, developmental, group-based process through which students achieve their academic goals, advance their professional development in the practice of applied community psychology, and, acquire valued educational resources to promote individual, organizational, and community well-being (p. 5).

Opportunities for student empowerment occur primarily in core coursework through supervised, group-based fieldwork with community based organizations. The level of training varies from *Exposure* to *Experience* with some students gaining *Expertise* through field study (Kloos, 2010; SCRA, 2012; Sarkisian & Taylor, in press). The ACP curriculum consists of a gateway course where students receive *Exposure* to all of the CP practice competencies (Community Psychology: Theories and Methods), four core courses where students develop *Experience* in selected CP practice competencies (Community Consultation and Collaboration, Program Development and Evaluation, Prevention and Promotion, and Psychoeducational Groups and In-Service Training Development), and a Field Study in ACP in which students may receive *Exposure*, develop *Experience*, or, in some cases, *Expertise* in student-selected CP practice competencies. Students also have an opportunity to take elective coursework which may provide *Exposure* or opportunities to develop *Experience* with various competencies (e.g., community coalition building, grant writing, empowerment in community practice, asset-based community development) (Kloos, 2010; Taylor & Sarkisian, 2011).

Community Coalition Building in Community Practice

The community coalition building course introduces students to contemporary theory, research, practice and debate on community coalition building. The major goals of the course are for students to develop their understanding of how community coalitions are structured and function. An additional goal is for students to develop a better understanding of sustainable strategies to promote well being in communities. Pedagogically, the course provides students with *Exposure* to community coalition building (Kloos, 2010). Students learn the value of community coalition building and how it can be applied in practice, yet, they do not gain supervised field *Experience* or *Expertise* in the competency through this course. The activities implemented to promote student learning and demonstrations of student learning in the community coalition building course are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Student Learning Activities and Demonstrations of Student Learning*

Student Learning Activities

Classroom Based Learning Activities (C)

Lecture by instructor and guest speaker, class discussions, coalition simulation exercise, group work, coordination of field work, and presentation of final project.

Reading and Applied Research Activities (R)

Reading text and academic articles, and, conducting research for the final project.

Group Work Activities (G)

Communicating with group members and coordinating research activities, which involved choosing text chapters and coalition organization for case study, dividing project responsibilities, creating a shared work plan, checking in with group members on process of work plan, sharing results and developing PowerPoint presentation, presenting final project, receiving feedback, and revising final presentation.

Writing Activities (W)

Writing final presentation collaboratively and revising project once feedback was received from instructor.

Field Learning Activities (F)

Conducting key informant interviews with agency representatives.

Demonstrations of Student Learning

Oral Presentation (O)

Oral presentation of findings from collaborative research project on a community coalition.

Final Presentation (P)

Final PowerPoint presentation slides of collaborative research project on a community coalition

After teaching the coalition building course in Winter 2012, the instructor and students began engaging in a participatory process to explore how they learned CP practice competencies. They agreed to focus research efforts on one question: *How did students learn CP practice competencies through a coalition building course?* To answer this question, students and the instructor discussed different tools available to facilitate the exploration of *how* they learned CP practice competencies. The result was an exploratory case study design which used a combination of descriptive methods, consistent with evaluating emancipatory knowledge (Cranton & Hogan, 2012), to facilitate deeper exploration of the process by which students reported learning CP practice competencies.

Method

Participants

Four students who were classmates in a Coalition Building in Community Practice course in the Winter, 2012 academic quarter participated in this study during the Spring 2012 quarter. While two students (Student 1 and Student 2) had completed all of their coursework in the ACP Specialization, two students (Student 3 and Student 4) had not yet taken the gateway course or any of the core required Specialization courses. The instructor has been

teaching in the program for seven years and the ACP Specialization founding director has been teaching in the program for ten years.

Design and Data Collection

Using an exploratory case study design (Patton, 1987), students and faculty utilized descriptive methods (i.e., course mapping, reflective writing & focus groups) to better understand the transformational aspects of learning CP practice competencies (Cranton & Hogan, 2012). Thus, the focus was on the self-reported experiences of learning which are subjective, biased, and not necessarily generalizable to other students or training programs. In line with the ACP student empowerment pedagogy and the CP principle of inclusion, students acted as collaborative researchers (Taylor & Sarkisian, 2011).

Students participated in course mapping, reflective writing, focus groups, coding and analyses of data. Faculty participated in course mapping, facilitated the focus groups as well as students' reflective writing, coding, and analyses of data. Data to develop the course map templates were collected using the curriculum mapping process and templates described by Sarkisian and Taylor (2013). First, criteria, categories and descriptors were developed into student learning activities and student learning outcomes.

Next, students and faculty independently rated the course map for the coalition building course. Both individually and through a focus group format, students and the instructor content analyzed (Patton, 1987) data using the CP practice competencies and criteria from a *Learned* course map legend as a broad framework. *Learned* course maps served as a starting point to identify CP practice competencies that would be the focus for reflective writing on how students learned (Harden, 2001). Subsequent meetings between students and the instructor were used to conduct data coding, analysis, and interpretation.

Procedure

During a fifteen-week period of time in the Spring 2012 academic quarter, students, the instructor, and the ACP Specialization director participated in a series of activities to better understand how students learned CP practice competencies in the coalition building course.

Development of declared and learned course maps.

Using the six-step curriculum mapping process described by Sarkisian and Taylor (in press), faculty developed a course map for the coalition building course. (1) Criteria were developed to assess curricula; (2) categories and descriptors for criteria were developed; (3) blank course maps were constructed by faculty; (4) faculty completed course maps; (5) student completed course maps; and, (6) faculty and students shared their results with one another. After the maps were completed, the instructor revised the generic curriculum map legend to reflect the actual (i.e., learned) student learning activities and demonstrations of student learning specific to the course (See Table 1).

Selection of CP practice competencies. Students and faculty met and discussed the similarities and differences between *Declared* and *Learned* course maps. Students and the instructor reviewed the course maps and identified CP practice competencies in which students had meaningful learning experiences. Through the first focus-group style meeting, three CP practice competencies (i.e., Ecological Perspectives, Community Inclusion & Partnership, and Collaboration & Coalition Development) emerged as competencies for further reflection and discussion (See Table 2). Below are the primary descriptions provided for each of the three CP practice competencies from the Fall 2012 TCP (SCRA, 2012):

- *Ecological Perspectives*: The ability to articulate and apply multiple ecological perspectives and levels of analysis in community practice (p. 10).
- *Community Inclusion and Partnership*: The ability to promote genuine representation and respect for all community members, and act to legitimize divergent perspectives on community and social issues (p. 10).
- *Collaboration and Coalition Development*: The ability to help groups with common interests and

goals do together what they cannot do apart (p. 12).

Reflective writing, coding, analyses and interpretation of data. Using the *student learning activities* (i.e., Classroom based learning, Reading and applied research, Group work, Writing, and Field learning) from the course map as a general framework, students engaged in reflective writing on how they learned each of the three selected CP practice competencies. Because the exploratory nature of this exercise, students were encouraged to lead from their experience in their writing and refer to the student learning activities as an organizing framework.

After all students completed their individual reflective writing, students and the instructor met and discussed the process of coding themes which illustrate a similar concept, issue, or idea (Patton, 1987). Students then individually coded themes and unique insights of their own writing and that of the other students. During the second focus group meeting, the instructor and students analyzed and interpreted data (i.e., students' individual writing on how they learned the three identified CP practice competencies). To increase the credibility of data from students, faculty collected and combined the raw and coded data and distributed the document to students who then had an opportunity to correct, edit, or add any information (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Additionally, investigator triangulation was utilized through having (1) students, (2) the instructor and (3) the ACP Specialization director conduct independent data analyses prior to the second focus group meeting to utilize three different viewpoints of the learning process (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 1987).

Results

First, differences between declared and learned course maps are described. Next, the student learning activities and instructor classroom activities reported to have been influential in how students learned the three identified CP practice competencies are presented. Supporting student quotations from reflective writing and a focus group are offered to illustrate the dynamic nature of their learning process and experiences.

Differences between Declared and Learned Course Maps

Table 2 presents the course map developed by faculty (i.e., declared course map) and maps developed by the four students (i.e., learned course maps) for the three CP practice competencies that were the main focus of this study. While demonstrations of student learning (Oral Presentation (O) & Final Project PowerPoint Presentation (P)) were rated nearly the same by students and faculty, there were differences in ratings for Student Learning Activities (lea) (Classroom based learning, Reading and applied research, Group work, Writing, and Field learning).

Table 2. Learned Course Map of Community Coalition Building Workshop and Three Identified Community Psychology Practice Competencies

Competencies for Community Psychology Practice	Instructor & ACP Specialization Director		Student 1		Student 2		Student 3		Student 4	
	lea	dem	lea	dem	lea	dem	lea	dem	lea	dem
Foundational Principles										
Ecological Perspectives	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R	O,P
Community Inclusion & Partnership										
	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R	O,P
Community & Social Change										
Collaboration	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,F	O,P
Coalition	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,G,W	O,P	C,R,F	O,P

Note. lea, Student learning activities (C, Classroom based; R, Reading and applied research; G, Group work; W, Writing; & F, Field learning); dem, Demonstrations of student learning (O, Oral presentation & P, Final paper). See Table 1 for full explanation of student learning activities and demonstrations of student learning.

Students identified *student tenure in the ACP Specialization* and *prior experience with CP practice competencies before program entry* as two viable reasons for the differences between learned and intended course maps. Student 1 and Student 2 had completed the gateway course and all four core Specialization courses. As Student 2 described, “I was introduced to ecological perspectives one year ago in my introductory Community Psychology class. These perspectives have been repeated throughout the program coursework, and each time I find new ways of understanding and applying these concepts.” Student 3 had not completed the gateway course or any of the core courses but had prior experience in most of the CP practice competencies covered in the course. This became clear in class during initial discussions on ecological perspectives:

While the professor was reviewing and diagramming the essential pieces of the ecological perspective for community psychology practices I was able to connect it with my previous study and practice of ecological principles in other disciplines and fields: game theory modeling, ecological dynamics; environmental studies, geographical and macro-scale epidemiological studies, cultural analysis and multi-level demographics (Student 3).

Student 4 had not completed the gateway course or any of the core courses and did not have prior experience in most of the CP practice competencies covered in the course. Yet, with quite varied levels of experience, all students reported feeling supported and being of support:

Throughout the class, students shared their learning with each other. This played out with more senior students sharing their knowledge of community psychology concepts as well as all students sharing aspects of their individual learning through discussion and the final project (Student 2).

In addition to ecological perspectives, students identified inclusion and collaboration as skills practiced in all learning activities as illustrated by the two quotations below:

All of the student learning activities reflected the importance of community inclusion and partnership, as each assignment required members to voice their ideas, give and receive input to/from each other when offering our, and to share project responsibilities while also providing the space for each group member to head their portion of the final presentation (Student 1).

Like other competencies, collaboration was practiced in an applied way across class projects, such that students were able to reflect on their own use of collaboration while they were studying coalition building. This was especially prevalent in the final project and evaluation of NAMI (Student 2).

While this overlap presented a challenge to examining concepts independently, as many of the CP practice competencies overlap or are applied simultaneously, investigator triangulation was utilized to minimize overlap between competencies and strengthen the credibility of the students’ self-

reported learning experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Below, for each of the three CP practice competencies identified by students as most relevant to their learning in the Community Coalition Building in Community Practice course (i.e., Ecological Perspectives, Community Inclusion & Partnership, and, Collaboration & Coalition Development), two student learning activities (i.e., the community coalition simulation and group work related to the final project) emerged as influential in how students learned the three competencies. Additionally, the instructor's ability to model skills associated with CP practice competencies and to provide feedback after students engaged in practicing skills was reported by students to have a positive influence on their learning process.

In students' reflective writing and in the focus groups, student learning activities such as class discussions and readings were reported to have served valuable roles while other student learning activities, such as the coalition simulation, were reported to function as a catalyst to learning: "Although I had an idea of what it entailed through selected readings, it wasn't until we completed the simulation exercise that I had working knowledge of the term 'coalition development'" (Student 1).

Student Learning Activity: Community Coalition Simulation

One of the classroom-based student learning activities included a community coalition simulation, an exercise to simulate a coalition through guided role play with each student assuming a different role in the coalition (Wolff & Sarkisian, 2013). The coalition simulation exercise was conducted on the second-class meeting, after the class had discussed the four CP practice competencies below. The following quote from Student 4 highlights how a combination of lecture and reading during the first day of the course provided her with a foundation in ecological perspectives from which to draw upon for the coalition simulation exercise:

The levels of analysis were introduced to me at the beginning of the coalition building workshop. I was able to learn about the ecological system by taking notes through the instructor's lecture. Reading chapters one and two of Tom Wolff's *Power of Collaborative Solutions* and the instructor's lecture gave assistance to my understanding of the four principles of ecology.

Ecological perspectives. After the coalition simulation exercise was over, the instructor guided students through each ecological level of analysis and had them identify levels that were considered as well as levels that were overlooked in the work of the simulated coalition. Through reinforcing the holistic

exploration of the issues after the exercise, students were able to continue their exploration of solutions to problems within an ecological context. Students found the application of the levels of analysis and principles of ecology after the simulation exercise helpful in reinforcing their prior knowledge of this foundational perspective, as Student 2 recounts: "Ecological perspectives were then applied in the coalition simulation, allowing us to see systemic dynamics in the process of bringing community organizations together to form a coalition". Additionally, the simulation afforded students an opportunity to explore and reflect on activities occurring on different ecological levels specific to their role in the exercise:

Through the experience of working in a small group (of student peers) ... I internalized how the various ecological levels interface with and impact each other, e.g., what kinds of intended and unintended pressures came to bear and what kinds of roles people or groups took on or were forced into (Student 3).

The coalition simulation exercise was also reported to be helpful to students as they were provided with an experience of coalition building prior to beginning work on their final project which helped them to gain a more in-depth appreciation of the work they would soon be studying.

Community inclusion and partnership. Students found community inclusion and partnership to be embedded in all student learning activities. Student 1, Student 3, and Student 4 identified the coalition simulation as the main class exercise that emphasized the importance of community inclusion and partnership. They discussed how critical inclusion is to the process of a coalition, providing a more realistic view of the challenges which arise when trying to promote community change. Additionally, the coalition simulation was an opportunity for students to practice enacting inclusion. The three quotes below illustrate how Student 4 deepened her knowledge of community inclusion and partnership through participation in the community coalition simulation:

Inclusion and partnership were introduced to me when the class did a coalition stimulation exercise where we were participating in the practice of a coalition working together at hand. My character was a mental health worker that was very limited in her knowledge, expertise and resources which coordinated perfectly to my knowledge of community coalitions and partnership.

By role-playing we were exposed to the pressures of having different views and perspectives while all having one common goal in building a strong community.

At the end of the exercise I was able to see the importance of people working together to give guidance, train, and facilitate the community to build a partnership that is able to make change. The exercise also gave a realistic view of the challenges that arise when trying to bring change to a community (Student 4).

Collaboration and coalition development. The coalition simulation was also experienced by all students as simulating challenges of collaboration in coalitions. Especially notable were difficulties in identifying causes or solutions to a problem when members of the coalition were anchored in different understandings of the issue that was the focus of the coalition's work as the following two quotes illustrate: "I found collaboration and coalition development to be very challenging because it requires everyone pursue a common goal" (Student 4).

The simulation exercise and activities for the final project relied heavily on the ability to work together with group members. The simulation exercise showed how the term collaboration does not necessarily imply that individuals working together will be on the same page when identifying the cause and/or solution to a problem (Student 1).

Additionally, students experienced various forms of exclusion which are commonly known to impede collaboration and coalition development. For example, Student 1 and Student 2 alluded to their experience of participation by other coalition members that was not necessarily genuine: "The coalition simulation also helped to demonstrate some of the difficult realities of the process (i.e., not everybody will contribute effectively)" (Student 2).

This exercise exposed me to a real-time scenario and process which was opposite of my initial expectations. The role-play exercise showed how representatives from participating organizations are sometimes mandated to attend meetings and therefore may not be willing to see issues from each other's perspective. This disinterest is counter-productive to the coalition and collaborative process and was difficult to work around (Student 1).

Silencing and finger pointing were also negative behaviors which resulted from interactions during the coalition simulation and mirrored negative processes found in non-simulated coalitions:

From the simulation exercise, I realized that the silencing of a member or members of the group detracted from our ability to find solutions that worked for everyone and that addressed each person's experience and needs regardless of what level they were at or perspective they brought (Student 3).

I played the role of a parent with a teenage son who constantly experienced problems with local police. It felt as though I was blamed for my child's actions and that I was not seen as a responsible parent. This exercise also showed me how participants come into meetings with preconceived notions as to the cause and solution of existing problems in the community. Most of our time was spent trying to define the problem, identify contributing factors and find common ground. It made me question how often participants attend coalition meetings without being fully invested in working together versus independently working to address community issues (Student 1).

While difficulties were experienced, toward the end of the exercise coalition members began to work more collaboratively to identify causes and solutions to the problems - positive behaviors that were processed after the coalition simulation exercise and are illustrated well by Student 3's experience: "Especially helpful was the dialogic constructive critiquing of the roles in the simulation and how that affected us personally" (Student 3).

Participating in the simulation and afterward critiquing our roles and our personal reactions to the simulation helped me observe and experience the dynamics of work partnerships and what makes them work and what can make them not work so well. It highlighted the importance of not leaving out the lived, experiential knowledge of community members. We also discussed ways to notice who might be left out of the collaborative process and how to include them. The simulation made clear the need for good facilitation to stay on task and truly address the work of the coalition so that it is effective and inclusive (Student 3).

The coalition simulation exercise was an effective tool in invoking the lived experience of students as a catalyst to link course concepts to community processes associated with the three identified CP practice competencies.

Student Learning Activity: Group Work Related to the Final Project

Group work related to the final project included communicating and coordinating research activities, dividing project responsibilities, developing and implementing a work plan, and, developing and presenting a final PowerPoint presentation. Students found their group work informative to developing their understanding of ecological perspectives, community inclusion and partnership, and, collaboration and coalition development – in both process and content.

Ecological perspectives. Student work on the final project with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

(NAMI) was observed by students to be a valuable opportunity to reinforce learning the ecological perspectives. For example, Student 2's observation summarizes how students experienced this reinforcing process:

I found it useful to see how change has to occur across organizations in order for large-scale civic change to develop. The group work and writing for the final presentation also helped to reinforce my learning of the ecological perspectives by giving me an opportunity to apply the principles in analyzing NAMI. Furthermore, I also had the opportunity to hear how other students applied the perspectives in their own analyses (Student 2).

Additionally, for Student 3, the field study aspect of the group work served to engage her interest in thinking ecologically:

As opposed to seeing a domesticated version or reading about it, looking for these competencies in our case study of NAMI was like tracking an animal in the wild. Field learning allowed for observing the interplay of several variables within the actual milieu of NAMI (Student 3).

Community inclusion and partnership. The practice of inclusion was reinforced through collaborative work as a small group in developing a case study on a coalition operating in Los Angeles (i.e., NAMI). Students were both practicing inclusion through their efforts as a small group and studying the inclusive practices of NAMI. The following quotes illustrate how the simultaneous practice and study of inclusion generated an opportunity for experiential learning and consciousness raising on issues related to inclusion:

Inclusion was a necessary element in the final project when we had to coordinate research and develop content for the presentation. Also, in writing my section of the final project, I applied the concept of inclusion from Wolff's text to a discussion of NAMI and in providing recommendations for future growth (Student 2).

I found Student 2's comment that he learned about the process of coalition development in NAMI from other students' presentations noteworthy because it re-connects with the principle of inclusion. Inclusion is not just about what you give, but also allowing other's to give and being receptive to those contributions. It is critical that each participant understand this when deciding to be involved with a coalition (Student 1, focus group)

Student 3's quote is particularly illustrative of how the multiple learning environments catalyzed into a consciousness raising experience:

The interaction with each of my classmates to create and present a final case study supplied precious opportunities to recognize who we each represented in terms of power and privilege, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and background and to consciously learn more about how to respect those differences and similarities and legitimize our divergent perspectives as we worked toward a common goal of a presentation with perceptions and insights that we could not have achieved separately (Student 3).

Collaboration and coalition development. Students reported collaboration as an essential skill in planning and implementing activities related to the final project. Student 1's quote below represents the experiences of all four students in learning the value of common goals in collaboration and coalition development.

I now have a better understanding of the collaborative process and do not expect it to be without differences in opinion or approach. The most important thing is remembering to guide the dissent back to a common goal (Student 1).

Yet, each student developed unique insights into which collaborative activities contributed to their learning as the following three quotes illustrate:

The group activities for the final project were more effective as a collaborative process. We proposed and selected organizations and divided responsibilities accordingly. We presented our ideas on how to complete the case study and what/how we wanted to contribute to the final project. Each member managed their own portion of the project and provided updates regarding where they are in the process and what the next steps should be (Student 1).

We choose to have each group member contribute a part to an overall PowerPoint presentation. In so doing the give-and-take of the group members in assembling the presentation, presenting it, and editing it created far more learning for me than if we had each written papers and submitted them individually for feedback from the professor. The need to bring all of our work together into one coherent whole called upon more small group skills than if each of us presented to the group individually. The process was full of hard work, serendipity, playfulness, concentrated focus, and nerve-racking efforts; all important components of group work within community psychology competencies (Student 3).

In the classroom we were able to discuss what organization we wanted to research, break up what areas each of us were going to study and what was each of our expectations. This was also

shown in the group work activity, where outside of the classroom we were able to exchange emails and coordinate research such as conducting interviews at the organization we agreed to research. When communicating effectively we were able to provide a final presentation (Student 4).

Group work activities related to the final project provided students with an opportunity to enact their value on inclusion and practice their collaboration skills within their group while the content of their final project focused on studying the coalition building efforts of NAMI within an ecological context.

Instructor Activities: Modeling of CP Practice Competency Skills

Students found the instructor's modeling of CP practice competency skills that were of focus in the course to be helpful to their learning. As the quotes below illustrate, students appreciated that the instructor was flexible, promoted a safe learning environment, and modeled the skills students were learning:

It was very important that expectations for the functioning of the classroom and interactions for the class were set in place and modeled by the professor and that the professor actively sustained a container for all our interactions as we practiced and worked our way through the course material (Student 3).

The instructor modeled inclusion with the students in determining the outline of the lecture as well as tailoring the assigned work (Student 2).

The modeling of the professor of effective interpersonal skills, consensus building skills, conflict resolution skills, group decision-making skills, and meeting facilitation skills allowed me to observe how it was done and to feel safe and playful in practicing the skills myself with immediate supportive and corrective feedback when needed that did not damage my standing in the class or my secure connection with the professor or my classmates (Student 3).

Discussion

In this exploratory case study, learned course maps provided a jumping off point for students to identify three CP practice competencies for further investigation of *how they learned* through engaging in reflective writing, content analysis and interpretation of data. Two notable differences in student ratings of course maps were attributed to student tenure within the ACP Specialization and prior experience with the CP practice competencies before program entry. These differences underscored the importance of the ability of the instructor to be flexible in the delivery of content and adapt material

to the knowledge and experience of the learners. The instructor's ability to model skills associated with the CP practice competencies students were practicing was also reported to be helpful to their learning process.

Empowering Qualities of Student Learning Activities

Two student learning activities (community coalition simulation & group work related to the final project) emerged as influential to students' developing their understanding of three CP practice competencies (ecological perspectives, community partnership & inclusion and collaboration & coalition building). The coalition exercise exposed students to a simulated experience that allowed them to explore roles in which oppressed individuals work together to overcome obstacles to community well being. And, small group work related to the final project provided additional opportunities to critically reflect on their own collaboration skills as well as the role of NAMI in facilitating opportunities for well being among people with mental illness. Both the community coalition simulation exercise and the group work related to the final project involved three activities connected to *how* students learned three CP practice competencies (ecological perspectives, community partnership & inclusion and collaboration & coalition building):

- (1) To read books and academic articles related to the course content – Community Coalition Building in Community Practice;
- (2) To apply course content in a safe, respectful, and supportive group environment, and, give and receive feedback to refine newly applied skills; and,
- (3) To participate in a group process that is influenced by the lived experience of participants, increasing access to consciousness raising opportunities related to understanding and applying course material.

The opportunity to experience multiple and differing group-process experiences related to the course material was reported by these students to serve as a catalyst to their learning CP practice competencies. This praxis experience was also reported by these students to have a reinforcing effect on learning and helped them to gain a better appreciation for the complexity of community work.

Implications for Academic Program Development

The findings of this study are consistent with the student empowerment focused pedagogy in the ACP Specialization (Taylor & Sarkisian, 2011). Exercises such as the community coalition simulation and class projects that require students to work within a small group environment are ideal learning activities to provide meaningful *Exposure* to coalition building and related CP practice competencies, especially when the structure and/or length of the course

prohibit opportunities for field learning in which mutually beneficial relationships can be developed between students and organizations in the community. In three of the four ACP core courses, students work in groups with an organization for a ten week period and gain *Experience* with CP practice competencies related to the course (Kloos, 2010).

Are there other programs utilizing student learning activities such as these to provide students with Exposure to CP Practice competencies? There are likely many. Developing a resource collection of student learning activities by levels of training – Exposure, Experience, Expertise (Kloos, 2010) on the Education Connection page of the SCRA website could be one method by which programs can begin sharing student learning activities by levels of training. And, there is already an infrastructure in place.

Limitations of the Current Study

One limitation to the conduct of this study was the interrelatedness among CP practice competencies and the experience of multiple competencies being applied simultaneously or in such close proximity, presenting a challenge to studying CP practice competencies independently. Although a small class size of four students allowed for a more in-depth view into accounts of how CP practice competencies were learned, the descriptive methods used in this study (i.e., course mapping, reflective writing and focus groups), while appropriate for evaluating transformative learning, are also subjective in nature and there is very little control for bias in students' reported insights. Additionally, the results of this study portray accounts of learning that are unique to the four students who participated in the course, limiting the generalizability of findings to other students or training programs.

Conclusion

The recent articulation of a draft of CP practice competencies by SCRA has provided educators with a common framework to explore how programs train and how students learn CP related skills (SCRA, 2012). In this case study, students and faculty explored student reports of learning CP practice competencies in a master's level psychology course designed to provide students with *Exposure* (Kloos, 2010) to Community Coalition Building in Community Practice. *Declared* (i.e., Faculty) and *Learned* (i.e., students) course maps (Harden, 2001) were constructed to identify three CP practice competencies that were experienced by students to be embedded in the student learning activities and demonstrations of student learning, and, that they believed were meaningful to their overall learning in the course. Using the *Learned* course maps as a starting framework, students engaged in reflective writing independently. Students and faculty then

coded and analyzed data generated through reflective writing.

A community coalition simulation and group work related to the final project emerged as two learning activities which students reported as meaningful to learning ecological perspectives, community partnership and inclusion, and, collaboration and coalition development. Both student learning activities also provided students with opportunities to gain practice in applying course related material through work in small groups to deepen their understanding. Finally, students reported the instructor's modeling of CP skills to be supportive to their learning CP practice competencies.

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