

Chapter 10

Situated Learning Meets Community Needs: Anatomy of a Community-Based Learning Project on Chicago's West Side

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a community-based learning project (CbLP) in the Chicago West Side community of Austin. This learning setting provided the context for applying instructional strategies, methods, and techniques that are grounded in principles of social-situational learning and competence-based education and the education philosophy of emancipatory or popular education. Student perceptions are presented in excerpts of their critical reflection journals and learning product samples, which were both resource contributions to the community and deliverables

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for assessment and evaluation of learning for students. The chapter illustrates key features of designing and facilitating learning within a civic engagement-themed CbLP.

INTRODUCTION

During the Summer of 2018, adult students, who were enrolled in competence-based undergraduate and graduate program courses, joined together to assist with a community needs assessment at the request of local community activists on Chicago's West Side. The West Side is a predominantly underserved area of Chicago consisting of *West Town*, the *Near West Side*, the *Lower West Side*, Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, South Lawndale, and Austin. This project focused specifically on Austin, said to be one of the most dangerous and crime-ridden communities (Tanveer & Bauer, 2016). In spite of this reputation, the instructor for this course, who is known to her students as "Dr. G.," offered this opportunity to engage in an authentic community action research project. Her long-standing participation in community work had provided her with the evidence that strong and varied assets exist among the residents and community-based organizations there. In her experience, collaborations between adult learners and residents in community settings are not fraught with hateful racism or marked by violence. Grounded in an education philosophy of emancipatory education (Freire, 1970) and asset-based community development (McKnight, 1980), and armed with the experience and insights gained from several decades of having worked as a community organizer in the now so-termed urban communities, Dr. G. collaborated with a former fellow graduate student during her own studies at Northern Illinois University, Ronald, to facilitate this community-based learning project.

This project lent itself well to the purpose of the university courses and to designing individual learning goals and objectives for adult participants. The three courses intersected at several points: They shared an overall purpose of exploring how volunteers and community activists can partner and collaborate to address community issues; the course outcomes included the ability to identify and analyze social theories, educational philosophies, and value systems; the competence assessments criterion of successful application of civic engagement strategies; and the skill of developing and applying participatory action research methods. These shared goals and outcomes made it possible to create an authentic learning community among diverse course participants in the context of a CbLP.

This chapter, co-written with project participants, chronicles the instructional design approach applied during the summer project; shares a sample of a learning product (Appendix Four) that provided evidence of learning; and conveys insight of the perceived benefit of this CbLP in excerpts of students' reflections. It delineates

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