RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST-BUILDING BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS: TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS *BY JUDY MARQUEZ KIYAMA*

Introduction

Much has been written about the importance of collaborative efforts between faculty and student affairs practitioners (e.g. Banta & Kuh, 1998; Dale & Drake, 2005; Kezar, 2003; Pace, Blumreich, & Merkle, 2006). Nonetheless, the topic remains at the forefront of institutional efforts, scholarly publications (see Dale & Drake, 2005; Magolda, 2005) and higher education and student affairs courses (e.g. Espino, 2012). Scholars push collaborations that are systemic and institutionalized in an effort to increase student success and retention (Dale & Drake, 2005) and research indicates that such collaborations do in fact, enhance "the quality of life for students" (Magolda, 2005, p. 16). In this essay, I focus specifically on the collaborative role between researchers and practitioners, with particular efforts that address relationship building to enhance educational equity for underserved populations. Researchers and practitioners often work towards common goals when considering access and success efforts for traditionally underserved populations (Kiyama, Lee, Rhoades, 2012), yet they remain positioned in dichotomous roles, separated by organizational structures (Pace, Blumreich, & Merkle, 2006), with faculty responsible for student learning and research, and practitioners responsible for student support (Dale & Drake, 2005).

Abstract

Researchers and practitioners often work towards common goals when considering access and success efforts for traditionally underserved populations. Yet, collaborations across these roles are rare and when they do occur, can be met with organizational, political, financial, and ideological challenges. This essay will explore some of these challenges and focus particular attention on the benefits of such collaborations when relationships are built on trust and reciprocity.

Challenges Facing Collaboration

Authentic collaborations between researchers and practitioners, beyond infrequent meetings and committee work, are rare and when they do occur, can be met with organizational, political, financial, and ideological challenges. These challenges are helpful to understand within an organizational culture framework (Lee & Kiyama, 2005). Organizational culture is typically characterized as an interconnected web (Geertz, 1973) with shared norms, values, and beliefs

that are often taken for granted (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Lee, 2007; Lee & Kiyama, 2005; Morgan, 1986). Therefore, culture can also be understood differently by the various groups within an organization, in this case – researchers and practitioners (Lee & Kiyama, 2005). Differing organizational structures, or organizational fragmentation can be a barrier to collaboration, as specialization among faculty and staff and a history of separation between various units is likely to exist (Kezar, 2006). Organizational structure can also create competition for resources (financial and human resources) and differences in leadership ideologies and expectations (Pace, Blumreich, & Merkle, 2006). Because these subcultures within organizations establish different values, skills, and separation (physically and hierarchically), challenges in cross-departmental collaborations exist (Dale & Drake, 2005; Kezar, 2003; Lee & Kiyama, 2005). The separation that results from different departmental and disciplinary boundaries can undermine potential collaborations (Love, Kuh, MacKay, & Hardy, 1993).

Researcher and practitioner partnerships are also met with challenges around management structures to support the collaboration, group and individual dynamics, a balance between building community or professional purpose, and the knowledge base of those assuming leadership for the partnership (Amey & Brown, 2005; Bernacchio, Ross, Washburn, Whitney, & Wood, 2007). Limited time from faculty and staff, unclear goals for the collaboration, and a lack of senior leadership support have also been noted as barriers to successful collaborations (Kezar, 2001). Even with the organizational and cultural challenges present when attempting to establish partnerships between researchers and practitioners, successful collaborations do exist.

Developing the Collaboration

The literature on researcher and practitioner collaborations often identifies pragmatic tips or strategies focused on organizational culture and leadership. For example, Whitt and colleagues (2008) analyzed collaborations across 18 different institutions and suggest the following recommendations: partnerships should advance the institutional mission; demonstrate learning-oriented environments; promote relationship building; recognize, understand, and value institutional culture; value and implement assessment; be good stewards of resources, and promote diverse opportunities for leadership. Specific to the focus of this essay, when considering relationship building, Whitt et al (2008) state that "effective partnerships grow out of existing relationships between and among academic and student affairs professionals" (p. 241). These relationships are built on shared values and often cross the organizational boundaries often noted as challenges. Their findings suggest that relationships are one key to the success of these collaborations (Whitt et al., 2008).

Other factors or "mediating tools" of collaboration include shared understanding of institutional missions and organizational culture (Amey & Brown, 2005; Kezar, 2005). For example, institution missions or philosophies are important to integrate into the culture of the institution through events like public forums or ongoing initiatives like student engagement (Kezar, 2005; Kezar, 2006). Organizational structures can be redesigned to better support collaborations between researchers and practitioners (Kezar, 2005; Kezar, 2006). Kezar (2003) specifically notes the importance of structural strategies like formal organizational rules and planning processes, and cultural strategies like dialogue and common vision. Shared dialogue and

language and ritualizing norms appear regularly as important tools to developing interdisciplinary and cross-departmental collaborations (Amey & Brown, 2005; Kezar, 2003).

There is often an assumption that collaborations are best initiated from a top-down approach or at least with senior leadership support in an effort to institutionalize policies and practices that sustain the outcomes desired from such collaborations (Harris, 2010; Kezar, 2001; Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). However, as Whitt et al. (2008) note, some of the most effective partnerships develop not from a top-down approach, but from preexisting shared values. This is discussed further in the next section.

Partnership Principles Informed by Community, Activism, and Agency

Collaborations can be built upon relational networks that are activist in nature, cut across different department cultures and administrative silos, and work towards organizational, equity-based change (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). Kiyama and colleagues term these networks "critical agency networks." The model of critical agency networks was suggested after an extensive study of faculty, researchers, student affairs practitioners, and academic administrators coming together for the creation and facilitation of a college outreach program serving low-income and families of color. The collaboration offered few tangible rewards; that is, no monetary compensation was offered and many faculty members did not even list the participation as a "service." The collaboration was an outgrowth of previously formed relationships, developed out of common social justice and equity-based values (Kiyama, Lee, Rhoades, 2012).

Another example of a critical agency network coming together is seen in Harris and Kiyama's (2015) partnership with a local school district. The project was initiated by the president of a local community organization serving Latina/o students and families. The president issued a call to action after consistently high drop-out rates for Latina/o students in the local school district. What followed was the assembling of school district personnel, higher education professionals, researchers, faculty, students, and parents who engaged in relationship building to develop the trust necessary to collectively carry out the project. While the project originated as a research effort, it has led to both programmatic and curricular efforts as well. The goal of this project continues to be structural changes leading to opportunities for Latina/o students as they transition through high school and into higher education (Harris & Kiyama, 2015).

These particular examples are reflective of community-driven or grassroots collaborations (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). These grassroots efforts are illustrative of bottom-up networks organizing around a common issue (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Important in Kezar and Lester's (2005) research is the role that virtual and external networks (sometimes within community contexts) can play in establishing these grassroots collaborations that originate on college campuses. I turn briefly to a discussion on community-engaged work, the principles of which not only highlight the resources found in external and community networks, but offer guidance for establishing authentic relationships across institutional contexts as well.

Community-engaged collaborations, known often as community-based research, are defined as "a partnership of students, faculty, and community members who collaboratively engage in

research with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change" (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003, p. 3). If we understand "community" broadly to also encompass partnerships between researchers and practitioners, we see that the principles of community-based research are quite useful. Specifically, partners work together to design and implement projects, community (partner) knowledge is valued, and works toward a shared understanding to address issues (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Polanyi & Cockburn, 2003). Key to these partnerships is the component of "with," which encompasses developing a collective understanding at each stage of the project, rather than one partner taking over the power role as the leader (Israel et al., 2005; Polanyi & Cockburn, 2003; Strand et al., 2003). Magolda (2005) also suggests that researcher and practitioner collaborations are possible and beneficial when there is shared commitment and power between partners, rather than researchers or faculty assuming the lead role. Shared leadership and power thus recognizes the multiple organizational frames and various forms of knowledge that each constituent brings to the partnership (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012; Magolda, 2005).

Interestingly, Whitt et al., (2008) begin their article with a quote from the American Association of Higher Education which states, "People collaborate when the job they face is too big, too urgent, or requires too much knowledge from one person or group to do alone." (p. 235). However, my own research and the examples shared above suggest otherwise. Underlying all of these examples and principles offered above are common threads, focused on issues of social justice and equity that bring researchers and practitioners to collaborative partnerships with long-term goals of systemic change. They are not brought together because the job they face is too big for one particular person; they are brought together because of a shared notion of critical agency--put another way, a shared commitment to advancing equitable opportunities for underserved students and communities.

Values of Relationship and Trust Building

Thus, in drawing from ideas embedded within developing critical agency networks (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012) and principles for community-engaged work (Strand et al., 2003), the following are noted as important values of partnerships based on relationship and trust-building between researchers and practitioners.

1. *Partnerships develop out of previously formed relationships.* As was evident in both the Whitt et al., (2008) study and the Kiyama, Lee, and Rhoades (2012) study, authentic partnerships between researchers and practitioners are likely to develop when previously formed relationships already exist. Often, these relationships are built upon the values noted below.

2. *Dialogues, open and frequent communication, and authentic conversations.* These conversations should include commitment to shared understanding about the sociohistorical nuances of the issue at hand, the sociocultural and moral discourses that inform the issue, and the organizational politics each partner faces in further addressing the issue (Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Magolda, 2005).

3. *Reciprocal relationships.* Reciprocity and mutually beneficial social exchanges within relationship building has been noted as a key component within social capital frameworks (Coleman, 1988), sociocultural frameworks like funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), and within community-engaged work (Strand et al., 2003). It is not surprising then, to suggest that reciprocal relationships will also strengthen the partnerships formed between researchers and practitioners (Magolda, 2005), particularly when addressing issues of educational inequities.

4. *Relationships built on critical agency.* Relationships that are built upon critical agency (Baez, 2000) share agendas that are activist in nature with movement towards a common social justice and equity-based goal. These partnerships are often created with and alongside members of the diverse communities such initiatives are meant to serve. Thus, these relationships can include researchers and practitioners internal to the institution and community members (i.e. students, families, non-profit organizations) that are also external to the institution (Kezar, 2006).

5. *Community-driven or grassroots efforts.* Building off of the fourth point above, collaborations can start with members of the community. Grassroots efforts then drive the relationship and collaborative development by identifying and informing the efforts. (Israel et al., 2005; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Polanyi & Cockburn, 2003; Strand et al., 2003).

It may appear that divisive silos orchestrated by organizational departments, values, and disciplines hinder partnerships between researchers and practitioners. Yet, perhaps one of the most important points of this essay is that authentic relationships between multiple constituents, built on shared values and trust, can overcome such organizational boundaries in an effort to establish equitable opportunities for students. In an academic environment where results, numbers, and productivity prevails; it is necessary to recognize that systemic change takes time. Investing in the partnerships that will lead to such change remain worth the effort.

REFERENCES

Amey, M.J., & Brown, D.F. (2005). Interdisciplinary collaboration and academic work: A case study of university-community partnerships. In Creamer, E.G., & Lattuca, L.R. (Eds), *Advancing faculty learning through interdisciplinary collaboration* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 102, pp. 23-35). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Banta, T., & Kuh, G. (1998). A missing link in assessment: Collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals. *Change*, Mar.-Apr., 40–46.

Baez, B. (2000). Race-related service and faculty of color: Conceptualizing critical agency in academe. *Higher Education*, 39(3), 363-391.

Bernacchio, C., Ross, F., Washburn, K.R., Whitney, J., & Wood, D.R. (2007). Faculty collaboration to improve equity, access, and inclusion in higher education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40(1), 56-66.

Bolman & Deal (1993). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. doi:10.1086/228943

Dale, P.A., & Drake, T.M. (2005). Connecting academic and student affairs to enhance student learning and success. In S.R. Helgfot & M.M. Culp (Eds.), *Community college student affairs: What really matters.* (New Directions for Community Colleges, No. 131, pp. 51-64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Deal, T.E., & Kennedy, A.A. (1982). *Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Espino, M.M. (2012). ECHD 9470 – Academic and student affairs collaborations. [Class handout: Syllabus]. College Student Affairs Program, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Harris, M. (2010). Interdisciplinary strategy and collaboration: A case study of American research universities. *Journal of Research Administration*, XLI(1), 22-34.

Harris, D.M., & Kiyama, J.M. (2015). *The Plight of Invisibility: A Community-Based Approach to Understanding the Educational Experiences of Urban Latina/os.* Peter Lang.

Israel, B.A., Eng, E., Schulz, A.J., & Parker, E.A. (Eds.) (2005). *Methods in Community-based Participatory Research for Health.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Polanyi, M., & Cockburn, L. (2003). Opportunities and pitfalls of community-based research: A case study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9(3), 16-25.

Kezar, A. (2001). Documenting the landscape: Results of a national study on academic and student affairs collaborations. In A. Kezar, D. J. Hirsch, & C. Burack (Eds.), *Understanding the role of academic and student affairs collaboration in creating a successful learning environment.* (New Directors for Higher Education, No. 116, pp. 39-51). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kezar, A. (2003). Achieving student success: Strategies for creating partnerships between academic and student affairs. *NASPA Journal,* 41(1), 1-22.

Kezar, A. (2005). Promoting student success: The importance of shared leadership and collaboration. Occasional Paper No. 4. National Survey of Student Engagement.

Kezar, A. (2006). Redesigning for collaboration in learning initiatives: An examination of four highly collaborative campuses. *The Journal of Higher Education,* 77(5), 804-838.

Kezar, A. & Lester, J. (2009). Promoting grassroots change in higher education: The promise of virtual networks. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 41(2), 44-51.

Kiyama, J.M., Lee, J.J., & Rhoades, G. (2012). A critical agency network model for building an integrated outreach program. *The Journal of Higher Education,* 83(2), 276-303.

Lee, J.J. (2007). The shaping of the departmental culture: Measuring the relative influences of the institution and discipline. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 29(1), 41-45.

Lee, J.J., & Kiyama, J.M. (2005). Bridging multiple departments: A campus-wide approach towards outreach to Latino parents. Unpublished manuscript.

Magolda, P. (2005). Proceed with caution: Uncommon wisdom about academic and student affairs partnerships. *About Campus,* Jan/Feb, 16-21.

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, XXXI, 132-141. doi:10.1080/00405849209543534

Morgan G. (1986). *Images of organizations.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Pace, D., Blumreich, K.M., & Merkle, B. (2006). Increasing collaboration between student and academic affairs: Application of the intergroup dialogue model. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice,* 43(2), 503-517.

Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., & Donohue, P. (2003). *Community-based research and higher education: Principles and practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Whitt, E. J., Nesheim, B.E., Guentzel, M.J., Kellogg, A.H., McDonald, W.M., & Wells, C.A. (2008). "Principles of Good Practice" for academic and student affairs partnership programs. *Journal of College Student Development,* 49(3), 235-249.

About the Author:

Dr. Judy Marquez Kiyama's research focuses the role of families and communities in developing college-going opportunities for their children. Before transitioning into a faculty position, Kiyama worked in student affairs overseeing college transition and success programs for first-generation, low-income, and students of color.

Contact Information: JUDY KIMAYA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, University of Denver, judy.kiyama@du.edu