Sustainability at the Core, Equity at the Center: New lessons from three years of community engagement through an engaged department

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“Education is the process of preparing our children in advance for the task of renewing a common world.” - H. Arendt, 1961
Agenda and Key Session Outcomes

1. What?
   - Equity/Sustainability/CBL: A No More One and Done approach to Community Based Learning
   - Explicate our model, research design and findings in an ongoing comparative case study
   - Explore elements of our model and discuss further applications

2. So What?
   - Lessons learned
     - Role of CBL as it contributes to sustainability at multiple scales

3. Now What?
   - Making meaning of it all
   - Strengthen our work though the focus on equity and sustainability
Some Definitions:

Community-based Learning

Community-based Learning (CBL) involves educating students in an academic discipline while also preparing them to be contributing citizens. By becoming involved in community activities, students benefit others while benefitting themselves, learning about teamwork, civic responsibility, and the application of intellectual skills to community issues.

- Portland State University, Office of Academic Innovation
Sustainability - the 4 E’s:
1) environment  2) economy  3) social equity  4) education

Social justice:
“the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.” - National Association of Social Workers

Critical Service Learning approach:
Critical service-learning programs encourage students to see themselves as agents of social change, and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities. This progressive pedagogical orientation requires educators to focus on social responsibility and critical community issues.

Equity at the Center:

“ Our region is stronger when all individuals and communities benefit from quality jobs, living wages, a strong economy, stable and affordable housing, safe and reliable transportation, clean air and water, a healthy environment and sustainable resources that enhance our quality of life.

We share a responsibility as individuals within a community and communities within a region. Our future depends on the success of all, but avoidable inequities in the utilization of resources and opportunities prevent us from realizing our full potential. Our region’s population is growing and changing. Metro is committed with its programs, policies and services to create conditions which allow everyone to participate and enjoy the benefits of making this a great place today and for generations to come.

-Metro Regional Government’s Equity Statement

“Let Knowledge Serve the City” Portland State University

Civic Leadership Minor: partnership design, research methods, pedagogy
Think, Pair, Share

- What brought you here today? What are your interests?
  - How do you imagine a Community Based Learning course connecting with those interests?

- CBL may be something you already do, if so - how does your CBL work address the 4 E’s of sustainability?
Organizing Principle: Sustainability

Action Strategies:
- Theory Frames
- Delivery

Mechanisms: CBL; Community Based Research

**Collective Impact Model**

**Engaged Department**

**Co-production**

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**Lents Neighborhood**
- Green Lents and the Malden Court Community Orchard
- Zenger Farm
- Floodplain Listening Project
- Lents Green Ring
Theoretical Grounding: Collective Impact, Engaged Departments, Co-Production

- **The Collective Impact Model**
  - *Collective Impact* is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

- **Engaged Department Model**
  - Similar to collective impact, the engaged department framework emphasizes a collective action orientation for members of the academic unit (Kecskes, 2013; Battistoni, Gelmon, Saltmarsh, Wergin & Zlotkowski, 2003).

- **Co-Production**
  - An approach where collective space is established for key civil society actors—especially citizens—to create new approaches to address entrenched community challenges is an essential implementation strategy (Ostrom, 1996; Block, 2009; Boyte, 2004; Fung, 2015; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).
Case Design: “Let Knowledge Serve the City”

- Civic Leadership Minor at PSU
- Institute for Sustainable Solutions (Sustainable Neighborhoods Initiative)
- Connected Over Three Academic Terms
- Connected Over Four Academic Years
- Targeted in One Community: SE Lents Neighborhood
- Social Sustainability Lens
- Simple Research Question: What happens to whom and how?
Case Study #1: Green Lents and the Malden Court Community Orchard

**Green Lents** is a non-profit founded in 2009 and supported by your neighbors, who are working to promote a culture of sharing and environmental sustainability in and around the Lents neighborhood in SE Portland. At the time they were not formally integrated as a 501c3.

**Malden Court Community Orchard Mission:** To work with our community to create and maintain a community orchard in the Lents neighborhood that reflects the needs and dreams of this diverse community.

**Student Inputs:** Canvassing, Data Collection, Community Design Meetings

**Guiding Question:** How can small grassroots organization authentically engage the community in the decision making process around the construction of a community fruit orchard?
Case #2: Zenger Farm

- Zenger Farm is a working urban farm that models, promotes and educates about sustainable food systems, environmental stewardship, community development and access to good food for all.
- Organizational strategic planning around diversity set the stage for our next CBL project.
- Three terms and four connected Civic Leadership courses.
- Guiding Question: How does an organization with a civic purpose authentically engage a diverse community?
Case Study #3: Floodplain Listening Project

The Partnership:
Green Lents (now incorporated as 501c3)
Portland Housing Bureau
Portland Bureau of Environmental Services

The Issue: FEMA floodplain insurance cost - per property, financial impact on residents

The goal:
- Assist city agencies and decision makers in understanding the financial and physical impact of flooding and flood insurance for residents of Lents
- Engage residents around the issue of flooding and flood insurance in the Johnson Creek 100-year floodplain

Guiding question: How can residents, businesses, community groups, and elected officials work together to build a sustainable, diverse neighborhood that is both livable and affordable?
Case #4: Lents Green Ring
People, Pollinators, Places

- A community place-making project that seeks to improve neighborhood safety, accessibility and enjoyment through conversations and collaboration across Lents’ diversity and geography.

- People centered approach to improving environmental and human health.

- Guiding question: How can students and partners engage in the identification, prioritization and creation of wayfinding and place-making improvements that equitably improve a community?
Methodology

- **Action research (AR) orientation** that seeks to create “participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity, and question posing are brought to bear on significant social issues (Bradbury, 2008)

- Immersion in “**high impact practices**” to enhance their ability to confront “unscripted problems” (Schneider, 2015)

- Drawing on the Malden Court Orchard case to situate Case #2 and Case #3

- **Inductive analysis** of student deliverables, directed content analysis, semi-structured interviews with partner organization in all three cases

- **Data triangulation**: archival records, interviews with comm. partners, organizational artifacts, and student final papers from throughout each year

- **Comparative Case Study Methodology** (Yin, 2002, Goodrick, 2014)
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<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Constitutive</th>
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| **Student**  | Hard Skills: Data collection, survey design, project management  
Fluid Skills: Empathic communication, team organizing, conflict resolution, real world problem solving | Exercising praxis and deep learning in action  
Shifts in self-conception  
Paradigmatic shifts on issues of equity, privilege marginalization, and social sustainability |
| **Faculty/Department** | Comparative case study  
Engaged and experiential curriculum  
Theory building  
Engaged departmental framework for SLCE work | Experienced intentional active connected SLCE work  
Connection to process over outcomes  
Building community and connection among faculty |
| **Fellow**    | Project management, data analysis, lesson planning, community event planning  
Reliable interface/liaison | Mentor/Mentee relationships  
Leadership among peers and as community leaders  
“Greater self-esteem and sense of worth” |
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<th>Similarities Cont...</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Constitutive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution/University/ISS</strong></td>
<td>A robust new model for SLCE developed</td>
<td>Strengthening of collective impact on the university level</td>
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<td>Data driven impacts/new relationships in community</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary lens incorporated into sustainability work</td>
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<td><strong>Partner Orgs.</strong></td>
<td>Increased partner capacity for community data collection</td>
<td>Increased org's involvement in community</td>
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<td>Provided data sets for grant funding and capacity building</td>
<td>Mission clarification and feedback loops</td>
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<td>Data driven impacts</td>
<td>Shift in perception of working with institutions</td>
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<td><strong>Community Members</strong></td>
<td>Community opinions were quantified and used to serve interests</td>
<td>For the most part, community felt listened to and relationships developed</td>
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<td>Community felt heard and seen</td>
<td>Institutions moved from enemy to ally</td>
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<td>Feedback loops to neighborhood institutions were created</td>
<td>Agency to self-advocate</td>
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**Surprises**
Democratizing the Classroom

- Geoffrey Schneider (2010) provides some helpful strategies in this arena:

  - Give students opportunities to reflect on materials with one another;
  - Create opportunities for student buy-in on assignments by giving them choices about assignments to pursue;
  - Provide opportunities for students to take some control of the structure of and discussions in the course;
  - Facilitate small group exercises that lead to larger group connections; and,
  - Surrender the role of the expert.
Democratizing the Classroom

- Not only do we aim to give students the professional knowledge of how to care for others and their world, but rather we try to create “learning to produce the necessary social and economic conditions that enable love, care, and solidarity relationships to be sustained economically, politically, and socially” (Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon, 2007, p. 434).

- Modeling relational leadership in classroom

- (a) involvement of the senses, (b) commitment and receptivity, (c) a quest for understanding and empathy, and (d) a productive tension between subjective certainty and objective uncertainty (Owen & Ennis, 2005, p. 407).

- These essential values should not be structured as neutral concepts in the classroom, however, but as informed by one’s own experiences or in relation to others (Bowdon, Pigg & Mansfield, 2015).
Keeping Citizens at Center of Community Based Learning

- **Pedagogy:** Delivery mechanisms focusing on coproduction, democratizing the classroom, a lens on social justice and equity, empowering students to see themselves as contributing members of communities and democratic societies

- **Research:** Collective Impact Model, Engaged Department, Action Research Orientation

- **Model:** Action Strategies focusing on Organizing Principles of Sustainability
Promising Practices for the Common Good

**Collective Impact**
- Focus on working together
- Identify and utilize a backbone organization
- Think and act longer term
- Use an equity lens when considering impacts and partnerships

**Engaging Departments**
- Connect departmental faculty teaching and research agendas
- Consider the Action Research Orientation as a means to connect research and communities

**Co-Production**
- Reciprocity
- Increase focus on collaboration (reduce/remove competition)
- Democratize the classroom, increase student ownership of process
“We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us.”

-Father John Culkin