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The Prickly Embrace of Engaged Scholarship: What it Means to do Research in an Urban Secondary (6-12) School

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Abstract

This paper describes how two professors struggled with traditional and non-traditional approaches to scholarship in order to understand how they could best serve students in a new secondary school (grades 6-12) while fulfilling expectations for tenure and promotion. Using methods related to reflexive autoethnography, the authors explore the rewards and challenges of building a partnership between a college and school that enabled the development of a comprehensive and systemic college and career readiness program called the Career Institute (CI). The professors explore the tensions that arose when they tried to both build and study this program. Over time, the professors realized that in order for the program to be important and meaningful for students, they themselves needed to develop a non-traditional approach to scholarship that was engaged, responsive, and service-oriented. Accordingly, they developed a model from which to theorize about the goals and aims of community-engaged scholarship: "Community-engaged scholarship" creates, explores and extends research as it is valued *by*, valued *for*, and valued *with*.

As university faculty members working in a school setting to develop and implement a college and career readiness program for students in an urban secondary (6-12) school, we have experienced the prickly embrace of pursuing scholarship that is engaged and service-oriented. Using the framework of reflexive autoethnography, we examine our work in a school community and locate areas where our positions as insiders (program developers) and outsiders (university professors) has led to instances of personal and professional fulfillment, frustration, and renewed sense of understanding of the ways in which creating and studying programs can serve both schools and scholarship. In sharing our

struggles of working within school and university communities, we illuminate the problems and possibilities afforded by community-engaged scholarship and reflect on why we continue in this effort. To that end, we use this paper as a platform from which to explore the ways in which engaged scholarship has in-formed our scholarship and teaching, re-formed our conceptions of the affordances of service, and ultimately trans-formed our own ideas of what matters in academic research. In reflecting on our work over 8 years in a 6-12 school, we revisit traditional conceptions of what is considered valuable and prestigious in research and rethink the purpose and meaning of our positions as professors in higher education. We conclude our paper with a call for a new model of community-engaged scholarship that is valid, reliable and legitimate, but approaches research from a different theoretical standpoint. In this new model of community-based scholarship, research arises from the needs and desires of the community; researchers study the process and product of research and recognize the significance of scholarship that is accomplished “with” others, has value “for” others and is valued “by” community members.

Ernest L. Boyer’s seminal works on the idea of engaged scholarship (1990; 1996) urges the academy to recognize a conundrum that often defines how scholarship is valued: He points out that while “Almost every college catalog in this country still lists teaching, research, and service as the priorities of the professoriate” (1996, p. 13), the reality is that “...on far too many campuses, teaching is not well rewarded, and faculty who spend too much time counseling and advising students may diminish their prospects for tenure and promotion” (1990, p. xii). Research and publication remain the primary means through which status in the academy, including promotion and tenure, is achieved (Boyer, 1990; 1996). Boyer offers a framework for re-thinking how to integrate Scholarship, Service and Teaching in powerful and meaningful ways. Although in this paper we focus primarily on the idea of service, Boyer’s paradigm of four interlocking functions that urges the pursuit of discovery, interdisciplinary learning, shared knowledge and application of that knowledge to improve lives remains a vital framework for our work. Through powerful and meaningful community-oriented service, we believe the academy will reclaim its historic place as an important vehicle for change through service (Kennedy, Gubbins, Luer, Reddy, & Light, 2003). With that overarching purpose, we examine recent works that take on the idea of service and scholarship and offer a new kind of framework that examines service-related scholarship as research that is valued by, valued for, and valued with. These theoretical lenses help us situate and theorize about our own experiences with engaged scholarship while building towards a new way of looking at our work in schools.

What does it mean to produce valuable research? Taking on that question means striving to get to the heart of what matters in our lives as scholars and women who entered the academy with a personal mission to make a difference in the lives of the people with whom we engage in research. With that in mind, we examine scholarship from our framework as valued by, valued for, and valued with.

Valued By: What kinds of Research does the Academy Esteem?

In 1996, Boyer asserted “Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation’s most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems” (p. 14). The recent work of Vogelgesang, Denson & Jayakumar (2010) indicates that not much has changed. In a review of studies examining faculty service, they found most institutions of higher learning do not reward faculty for service—particularly for service in the community. Furthermore, they found that “such work is often viewed as detrimental to promotion at research universities” (p. 439). Engaged scholarship, community service or “service” is not often valued in the academy’s reward structures (Biraimah, 2003; Fellner & Siry, 2010; O’Connor, 2006; Vogelgesang et al., 2010). As O’Connor (2006) suggests, the characteristics that describe service-oriented scholarship, such as collaborative, practical and local, “are counter to the conventional academic definition of exemplary research, which privileges single-author, theoretical, and cosmopolitan work” (p. 55). Traditional models of conducting educational research tend to esteem studies that produce knowledge that may be representative of general populations (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman & Vallejo, 2004). This is achieved by transforming individual characteristics into “variables” that then function as representations in analyses of causes and effects.

Hostetler’s (2005) complaint that adherence to quantitative designs remains the preferred method of research is supported in part by the U.S. federal government in response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In the government’s conception of research-based programs, Hostetler argues, “good research” consists “of experimental studies that yield prescriptions for action” (p. 16). The prescriptive, experimental study is the “gold standard” for research and as such poses many opportunities for publication. Outlets for service oriented research are not as robust. O’Connor (2006) cites several academic journals that publish community-based research. This separating out of the kinds of disciplinary journals that

publish articles related to civic engagement underscores the depth of the chasm that continues to define “valued” research narrowly as the discovery of new knowledge (Boyer, 1990; Vogelgesang et al., 2010).

The very structures of the university help shape how scholarship is valued. Fellner and Siry (2010) describe these structures as “engrained as habitus, as hegemonic structures that we all acquiesce to without even being aware of them” (p. 783). For instance, the understanding of tenure and promotion as resting on the “three-legged stool of teaching, research and service” (Kennedy et al., 2003) tends to imply that all the legs are equal, yet in the final determination for tenure and promotion, service is much less valued, and this is especially true for service that takes place in K-12 schools (Fellner & Siry, 2010). As the stool lists heavily in the direction of scholarship, our charge becomes clear: Our work in schools and in communities must yield scholarship that is academically informed, and locally produced, and locally transformational. If that goal seems impossibly romantic or even ridiculous (Fellner & Siry, 2010) our work is buoyed by the exemplary work of others striving for the same goal. Through publications and dialogue with colleagues, we join Fellner and Siry when they say, “such advocacy might lead to a crumbling of traditional conceptions of service and scholarship and open up new possibilities that further collective benefits for all stakeholders” (p. 784). This purpose reflects the academy’s historic commitment to the greater good and to what Boyer (1996) calls “engaged scholarship.”

Valued For: What is the Purpose of Engaged Scholarship?

Engaged scholarship is concerned with research that actively addresses real and pressing social and civic issues (Biraimah, 2003; Boyer, 1996; Small & Uttal, 2005; Vogelgesang et al., 2010). It may be differentiated from other kinds of research in that scholarship that is “engaged” derives its research questions directly from local issues, problems, needs or questions. This service-first approach to scholarship requires that researchers spend a lot of time in the field, getting to know participants and the local issues that matter. As such, the scholarship that emerges as a result of community engagement has an application to social problems and/or helps illuminate social issues. In this way, it may be argued that the central purpose of this kind of work is to bring about change at different levels in society, including individual, organizational and societal (Bensimon et al., 2004). In the scholarship of engagement, locally constructed insider knowledge is understood to carry the potential to effect real change. If we examine service and scholarship through the lens of value and purpose, then we necessarily begin to look at them as inseparable and mutually constitutive.

Engaged scholarship advances the idea that civic engagement integrates service and scholarship into an inseparable whole (Wade & Demb, 2009) thus framing this kind of scholarship as imbued with value and purpose. The “goodness” of the research rests on factors other than variables. As Hostetler (2005) argues, “Good research is a matter not only of sound procedures but also of beneficial aims and results. Our ultimate aim as researchers and practitioners is to serve people’s well-being—the well-being of students, teachers, communities, and others” (p. 17). The value of engaged scholarship may therefore be seen through the lens of the changes effected as a result of the work (Boyer, 1990; Dyrness, 2008). In this way, engaged scholarship is service-oriented.

Engaged scholarship also takes up ethical questions that are generally avoided by other kinds of research (Hostetler, 2005). Taking up research questions with ethical overtones risks producing scholarship that may seem vague and different from other kinds of scholarship (Boyer, 1990). For example, Tilley-Lubbs (2009) grapples with ethical issues related to engaging her students in academic service learning (see next section). The struggles that she articulates and the lack of conclusive answers often found in this kind of research may be off-putting (Hostetler, 2005). The challenge of engaged scholarship is to demonstrate how the value of research may be seen in its works rather than its results or answers. When Fellner and Siry (2010) ask, “How can faculty be motivated to transform university structures that favor individual benefits over the larger good?” (p. 782) part of the answer is through stories of transformation, offering glimpses of possibilities generated by research questions that avoid pat, tidy endings and instead offer ideas of how research questions may be framed in ways that are good for people (Hostetler, 2005).

Valued With: What Happens when Research is Conducted with Others?

Traditional conceptions of service and outreach turn on a unidirectional model of knowledge production (Bensimon et al., 2004; Fellner & Siry 2010; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008) in which knowledge is produced at the university and passed to the consumer public. The very word “service,” Fellner and Siry argue, “connotes a one-way dynamic; it is something done for others” (p. 777). They go on to suggest, “We need a new term, one that celebrates equity and mutual transformation...the idea that we are all in this together, that we are doing something *with* not *for* one another” (777).

Boyer's (1996) description of public service as "engagement" helps university faculty to begin conceptualizing collaboration as mutually beneficial-- a "two-way" approach to serving the community—one that involves reciprocity and the idea of partnerships (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008) and may even be seen as transformational (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq & Morrison, 2010).

Tilley-Lubbs (2009) uses an autoethnographic approach to explore her own "transformational" experience of bringing her college students to help local Spanish-speaking families with whom she had established a relationship. Her idea was to give her college students an experience of engaging in real service and scholarship in order to effect positive change: For example, her students would have the opportunity to practice Spanish and experience Mexican and Honduran cultures, while the families would benefit from the students' campaigns to find clothing and furniture for them. Instead of the positive experience envisioned by Tilley-Lubbs, her students revolted, complaining about feeling intrusive and like voyeurs of the less fortunate. Tilley-Lubbs came to recognize and appreciate her students' discomfort with the program, and went back to critical reading theory to explore how she had unwittingly perpetuated asymmetrical power structures by enforcing a unidirectional model of service. Her work with real people as a researcher and professor was transformed by her new and uncomfortable understandings.

Other researchers have experienced similar transformations and revelations as a result of working with real people in communities: Dryness (2008) talks of her experience as an ethnographer of a movement that studied ways that Latina immigrant mothers organized for their community. While Dryness discusses the changes effected by her participatory research team, she also speaks candidly of the problems, risks, tensions, challenges and social inequalities that she negotiated as she tried to assist the mothers in their quest to start a new small school. She ends with the injunction, "research should be about making life better for the people it touches" (p. 41) and speaks frankly about how the Latina women in the community "directed me to engage in ways I could never have conceived on my own" (p. 41). Ayala (2009) discovered similar knowledge and transformation when she engaged in research that tried to understand the experiences of first generation students in a 4-year college. Students were co-researchers in the project—a project that she said "mattered to me personally...because I feel it as social justice work, as collective spirit work" (p. 82). These three studies capture the power, joy, messiness, complexity and rewards of working within communities to help improve the lives of others. The studies also speak to Fellner and Siry's (2010) point that the very identity of university faculty is mediated through the experiences of service itself and provides "an immeasurable benefit...as a person, as a scholar, and as a teacher" (p. 780). It is also important to note that this kind of scholarship is community-based with a deep service component. In this way, it differentiates itself from the "gold standard" of research that privileges experimental studies (Hostetler, 2005) that necessarily offer interventions to some and not others. The needs of the experimental research model dictate the way services are provided. In the kind of community-engaged scholarship we discuss here, the needs, desires and questions of the research participants dictate the way services and interventions are provided.

In the next section, we attempt to illuminate our own personal transformations as engaged scholars—transformations that derive from our struggles to understand what it means to put the needs, interests and desires of the school community before our own.

Method

While both of us have written extensively on our work developing a college and career readiness program in a new small school (Rivera & Schaefer, 2009; Schaefer, Rivera & Ophals, 2010; Schaefer & Rivera, 2011; Schaefer & Rivera, 2012) this is the first time we've written about our work in a reflective manner. The issues, concerns, frustrations and rewards that we articulate here represent hours of conversations in which both of us struggled to come to terms with the fact that building a real program in a real school with real students, teachers and administration required flexibility, adaptations and modifications that effectively ended any chance for the kind of traditionally valued academic research where the program is a fixed variable around which other variables are studied. Instead, the program was and is constantly in flux. While working in the school, we collected surveys from students taken before and after their experience with the Career Institute (CI); provided professional development sessions before beginning the CI; interviewed teachers after the 4-6 week interventions (informally over lunch); and we provided assistance to teachers and staff during the CI itself. In this way we developed, studied and helped implement the program. These multiple roles emerged as necessary in order to keep the program responsive to changing student and teacher needs. These multiple roles also left us bemused and sometimes confused about our primary role: Researcher? Program Developer? Teacher? Bringing a reflexive, autoethnographic lens to our work helped us examine our experiences as insiders and outsiders to the community.

As we draw on these experiences to develop a framework of understanding that reflects our own emerging knowledge of what it means to do community-engaged scholarship, we locate our findings in a critical theory paradigm; specifically, we use a reflexive, autoethnographic stance (Ellis & Bochner, 2003; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) to reflect our emerging knowledge as both *process* and *product* (Ellis et al., 2011). To this end, we each write separate reflexive examinations of our own struggles, rewards and transformations experienced as we continue to work closely with one school community. These reflexive examinations focus on the research *process*. Following our individual reflections, we locate our experiences in a theoretical framework that emerges from our review of the literature: Accordingly, we re-examine and theorize what we have learned about engaging in community-based scholarship through the lenses of thinking about whom engaged scholarship is valued by, valued for, and valued with. These findings, thematically framed, represent the *product*.

Background, the Career Institute

Our program, called “The Career Institute,” began in a new small school located in an urban, northeastern part of the United States. The school, which we will call the “Inquiry School,” was an early college high school (6-12) designed to help struggling and non-traditional students (i.e. students of color, English Language Learners, students receiving special services) get ready for college and earn college credits while still in high school. As part of an early college high school community, the school forged deep connections with a local four-year college. Both of us were involved in planning the school curriculum prior to the school’s opening. Mary Beth (first author) who self-identifies as White middle-class, worked as a liaison to the college, ensuring that the academic program would support students’ college readiness. Lourdes, who self-identifies as a middle-class Latina, was then an assistant professor of counseling. She became involved in the school out of concern that students graduating high school with the target goal of 60 college credits might not have a clear sense of their career path, college major, and understanding of self in relation to work. In 2005, also the first year of the school, there were 81 sixth graders enrolled in the Inquiry School. Mary Beth’s experience with curriculum development and college readiness worked well with Lourdes’ expertise in career development and counseling: Together they volunteered to work with teachers and administrators to produce a program for students to engage in during their Advisory period. The principal enthusiastically accepted the offer.

We called the program “The Career Institute.” Its activities consisted of interventions designed to ask students to begin thinking about what they were good at and what they liked to do. From those first interventions, we created a sketch of what a developmentally appropriate college and career readiness program might look like in each grade. Every year thereafter, we created detailed activities and interventions to take place in Advisory for approximately 4-6 weeks.

Over the years, the outline of the Career Institute has shifted and changed according to need and interest, but generally the Career Institute lasts 4-6 weeks and is implemented during the school’s daily 30 minute Advisory period. For grades 6-8, the focus of the program is on *Exploration*: Students examine their interests and abilities and begin expanding their horizon of possible careers related to these interests. The culminating activity is a Career Day for grades 6 and 7 that is held at the school. Here students read the biographies of 10-12 different speakers and, based on their personal interests, choose to attend 3 different sessions where they meet with speakers in smaller, more intimate groups. For grades 9-10 the focus shifts to *Research*: Now that students have ideas about careers related to their interests and abilities, they begin to examine colleges that offer related majors and look into careers that seem interesting. Again the culminating activity is a Career Day, but for the 8th and 9th grade students. This Career Day is held at the college and structured like a conference with a keynote speaker and sessions. The 10th grade students no longer attend Career Day; instead, they begin to go on school-organized college visits. The activities for grades 11-12 focus on *Implementation*: Here students reflect on what they’ve learned about their career and college interests over the years and begin writing their college applications. They also research grants and financial aid and search for scholarships. Upper classmen continue to take organized field trips to colleges within a 90 mile radius.

Our first sixth grade class is now graduating. As we look back over the years of building and studying this program, it is clear that from the outset of the school and the CI program that our priority was in connecting the rich resources of the college and community to help the culturally, ethnically and economically diverse students at the Inquiry School become college and career ready. In short, our primary purpose was to serve, support, and prepare students for their futures: Before either of us had even heard of the term, we were deep in the throes of the scholarship of engagement. What that meant to each of us on a personal and professional level is described next.

Engaged Scholarship on the Tenure Track: Mary Beth's Story

I wasn't all that concerned about research when Lourdes and I began the Career Institute. Instead, I wanted to make sure that the program activities were interesting, engaging and relevant for students. To help construct the program and its activities, I drew on my nine years of experience teaching English Language Arts in middle school and as well as knowledge gained from a newly minted doctorate in adolescent literacy. Lourdes and I went into the Advisory classrooms during the early years and implemented the lesson plans that we created. We provided professional development for teachers and secured the support of the administration and school counselor. Eventually, the implementation of the lessons was taken over by the teachers and counselors. We remained involved in the program in various ways (e.g., revising lessons plans, participating in the classroom activities and helping with Career Day). As the years went by, we collected open-ended surveys that demonstrated ways in which the Career Institute helped students become more reflective about their future, more open to diverse careers, and more realistic about their college and career options. But we had no quantitative proof. Because our program kept evolving and changing in response to the schools' needs and challenges, we had no "pure" independent variable that could be studied in order to create a replicable, research-based proven program. Confident that we were making a valuable difference in the lives of students, I was not too concerned with producing the kinds of academic scholarship valued by the academy—until I accepted a position as assistant professor at a local university.

It was quickly apparent that as a professor on a tenure track, I was expected to produce and publish research that could be scaled up and replicated. I felt stuck between what I knew was working (see Schaefer & Rivera, 2012) and what the academic community valued. At the same time, I was told that my service and teaching were just as important as my scholarship. At first I perceived each of these "legs" separately—but soon I found that the idea of community-engaged research helped me conceptualize all three as mutually constitutive and informative. Indeed, I began to see my community-engaged research as the heart of my scholarship, teaching and service. But did the university?

During my yearly reviews for tenure, I was advised to write single-author publications and produce research that could be "scaled up." These parameters did not comport with my work in the Career Institute—here my scholarship and work inside the schools was deeply rooted in a program that I had co-constructed with my research partner, as well as with the principal, teachers and school counselor. There was nothing "single" about it, and the program itself was continually modified and developed in accordance with the unique needs and desires of a particular school community. Our program, as such, could not be scaled up. I faced a dilemma: Here was a program taking up a lot of my time. I needed to "use" the data we had already collected. Were there ways I could use the "gold standard" of educational research to "prove" that the Career Institute worked? I asked for help from my colleagues, and the answer was the same: Get a control group. Compare "like" communities. But that would mean administering surveys to groups of students whom I did not know in order to measure their college and career aspirations. I found myself unwilling to do this. If I looked into the eyes of those underserved secondary students, I think I would immediately want to begin college and career interventions. In fact, not to feel this way would probably be worse. At this point I confess I longed for a science lab where I could work with plants or fungi or even viruses and control for just about everything. Working with people, wanting to research with people, began to feel like an albatross. I was at my wit's end. I had years of research that had power and meaning for a local school community, but which was not quantifiable nor generalizable nor representative. In short, I had nothing of "value."

So why do I continue to develop and study and help implement the CI program? I remain for two reasons: first, I have deep affection for the school and its students, teachers, staff and administration, and to leave would feel like a betrayal, as if I were only tied to the school for my research and once I had my "findings," I would close up my computer and leave. Another reason is conviction: Based on our open-ended surveys and our work with staff and students, we know the program helps students make important connections between their current school work and their future aspirations. I want to continue the work because students need it. In this way, engaged scholarship and service become intertwined. But I still need to publish.

As I began reading more about engaged scholarship, I came across the idea of action research as a way to link theory and practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Levin & Greenwood, 2010). Action research methods have a kind of spiraling effect: The action in real contexts leads to reflection on results and then further action (Arhar, 2007; Nolan & Vander Putten, 2007). Action research, described by Levin and Greenwood (2010) as a "democratic and engaged activity giving voice to everyone involved" (p. 39) helped me to envision research as an intensely democratic venture with transformative possibilities. In this way, Lourdes and I were not building knowledge with traditional paradigms, rather, we were using "living knowledge" to help us understand the program—what was working for students and teachers as well as what

programmatic changes needed to be made. Employing an action research perspective allowed us to blend theory and practice and look at the CI program as a community endeavor that occurred in cycles of action and reflection (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke & Sabhlok, 2010) and enabled us to celebrate the changes and challenges to the program instead of causing us worry over control groups and independent variables.

Revisiting our CI research and findings through an action research perspective also helped us understand the rich data gained from students' and teachers' voices. We examined and coded (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) students' answers to our open-ended questions (i.e. "If money were not a concern, what might keep you from going to college? What specific activities do you enjoy or are particularly interested in?") with the purpose of using students' answers to help guide our thinking about how to make activities more relevant and engaging. In this way, we began to more carefully craft lessons *for* students. In their answers to open-ended survey questions and interviews, we could see problems and possibilities of our CI program. An example may be helpful here. In May, 2012 we formally interviewed students from the first graduating class to gain more insights and understandings as to how or if the CI program had influenced or guided their thinking.

We asked students to tell us about their experiences over seven years in a new small school. As students talked about their interests, goals, dreams and college/career focus, we were impressed by their insights and self-awareness and became even more convinced of the value of the Career Institute. By working and talking *with* students, even as school community outsiders, we could see how students valued the ideas and purposes of the CI—interestingly, not while they were immersed in the activities, but as they reflected back over their experiences. While the purpose of this reflection is not to re-analyze and look at student data, it is helpful to illuminate what I mean with a quote from one of our graduating students:

... I've had this goal in my mind, like, um, I guess in the beginning of high school or probably in middle school, they had you take these career tests and tells you what you want to be, what you're good at. And I got um, this, I scored like this into this category like social and creative, I guess. I think that's what it was. So I thought, "You know what? I am a pretty social person, I'm pretty creative, I'm going to be an artist." So that was going to be my goal so I guess what sort of drove me into wanting to be successful was having that goal in mind-- like right now, um, I am still even though it's already the end of May and we're almost graduating, most kids would just (makes a sound) go down the toilet with their grades and stuff like that. But I actually want to be better, I want to better my art work, I want to be better in my school work because I know that if I am, I will get to my goal. And I will do what makes me happy which is fulfilling my career. Which is actually it reminds me of what this political science teacher that we had...told us that the reason why we go to college is to not have a job-- it's to get a career. And I found that so inspirational just because that's what I want, I don't want a job, I don't want to have to wake up to just think in my head, "Ugh, I have to go to work." I want to wake up and think I am going to work, this is great, I cannot wait, I cannot wait to get dressed and get out of there and go and do what I love doing. So I guess pretty much having a goal in mind actually sort of drove my education.

This particular student, who chose the pseudonym "David" and self-identified as a "light-skinned Latino," also described his struggles to stay in school while living in a community where "there were so many kids who got pregnant, got someone pregnant, went into drugs and just stopped going to school." David himself missed over 120 days of school in sixth and seventh grade combined, but once he began reflecting on himself, his goals and his future, he was able to embrace the support of teachers and school staff and graduate with a scholarship to a prestigious art school in the Midwest. When I think of why I continue to work on this program, David's story comes to mind.

Looking back at our program, we see that while we embraced the ideas of Engaged Scholarship by collaborating with teachers, school counselors and administration, a multi-directional approach to building this program also needed to include the voices of students. By talking and planning with students, we would be able to address complaints of boredom and irrelevance as they arose. Looking forward, we are excited about creating activities with the help of students in order

to engage all students more fully. We look forward to scholarship *for* and *with* students in the school so that the CI program and our scholarship will continue to be valued *by* the school community.

The Push and Pull of Scholarship and Service: Lourdes' Story

When I was invited by my colleague to join her in writing about our research, my initial reaction was “great, cool, this should be fun, we get to talk about and share what we’ve been working on for the past eight years.” But then, as we talked through how we would approach the organization of the manuscript and what we wanted to communicate, I felt the same feelings I’ve felt throughout the years that we’ve been working together to create and study a program, an experience that we believed would enhance the lives of the students in the school we were working with--“How do we make this scholarly; how do we make this into a ‘respectable’ piece of scholarship that my colleagues in my institution, in my field, would recognize”? This is the struggle I have been grappling with these past eight years and which continues to plague me, even as I write this narrative.

Before I continue, I think it’s important to note that my background is in Counseling Psychology. As such, I was educated in the scientist-practitioner model; however, the scientist component seemed to hold sway. The research we were exposed to, for the most part, was that of a quantitative persuasion. I learned about quantitative methodologies and the projects I worked on, including my own dissertation research, utilized this methodology. Qualitative methods were discussed during my years as a doctoral student, but somehow, the message that the quantitative methods were the standard to adhere to and strive for was conveyed. This message was deeply embedded in me. And working in higher education, its strength, its pull has not been diminished—not much.

I think it is also important to note that, unlike my colleague, when we began this work, I was an assistant professor in my first year on a tenure track line. I was keenly, even painfully, aware of the need to engage in scholarship and publish my work--to meet the expectations of the academy. However, prior to my current position as a counselor educator, I worked for many years as a counselor providing career, personal and academic counseling to a diverse student population in an urban community college. Working with college students who tended to have a limited understanding of what they would or could do when they “grew up,” I was struck by the fact that although they were seeking a college degree, they seemed to lack an understanding of the connection between who they were, their education and their future. In short, the degree was a means to an end, but what that meant to them, how that related to their lives, wasn’t really clear. Thus, I worked to help them explore possibilities, to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the opportunities available and most importantly, to think of themselves as active participants in creating their futures rather than recipients of information, or a degree, that would help them get a job.

So, when I learned about the early college school that was proposing that high school students could graduate with up to 60 college credits, I was shocked and intrigued. Shocked because, given my experience, I’d seen students come to college with a very limited understanding of what it meant and its purpose; intrigued, because I saw an opportunity to infuse in the school a career development component that would engage students in exploring themselves as individuals with interests, abilities, desires, and to help them make connections among understanding themselves, their education and their possible future careers. In doing so, maybe these students could avoid entering college (with up to 60 credits) without having an understanding of what it meant to them.

And so, when I began my involvement in this project, I thought of it as mostly contributing to the service component of the three-legged stool. And though I hoped that I would be able to write about and publish on the experience, I really wasn’t thinking about it as scholarship. After all, although I was encouraged to become involved in the school and contribute my expertise in the area of career development and counseling, I also got the message that I not let it interfere with my scholarship—yes, service is important, but scholarship will earn you tenure. And thus, the push and pull between service and scholarship was ever present for me, along with the question, “How do I balance the two?”

This struggle became more prominent as my involvement in the project became more and more time consuming; relationships needed to be built, trust needed to be earned, and curriculum needed to be developed. All of this took precious time with little apparent or concrete outcomes. And as the program continued to evolve to meet the needs of the students and the school, I struggled with how to make it a “scholarly” endeavor. The progression of our scholarship wasn’t linear—we didn’t have a clear start and end point: We changed our plans, we changed our interventions, and we changed and changed some more as the need arose. So, is this service or is this scholarship? Where did service end and scholarship begin? The ongoing metamorphosis of the program and our work kept that question, that struggle, very much alive.

In addition to the changes that we were continuously making to our program to accommodate the needs of the students and the school, I also struggled with what I experienced as the unorganized and unstructured nature of being in and working in a dynamic school environment. There were no quiet offices to which I could retreat and think. When not in a classroom with 20 to 30 students, we were working in the middle of the principal's office while a constant stream of students and staff whirled around us. Meetings would be set, activities scheduled and on more than one occasion we would show up to find that schedules had been changed, or the staff we were to meet with were not available due to some unforeseen situation that had suddenly come up. These experiences only increased my unease as to whether I was engaging in service or scholarship.

Given this dilemma—provide service or engage in scholarship—there were times when the only thing that kept me from retreating to my “scholarship” was the belief and the commitment I felt to making a difference in the lives of students. But isn't this just service in the interest of “doing good”? If there is a line to be drawn, it is not a clear one; at least it isn't for me. As our work progressed, there were moments when I was able to accept that yes, perhaps my focus was on service, on making a difference in the lives of these students, but it was also on scholarship—we were learning about educational systems and how to negotiate them, we were identifying interventions and implementing them in the real world, we were assessing what was working and what wasn't. We were creating, dismantling and creating again.

As I was working in the “real world” with teachers and students trying to implement a program that met the needs of the community while also incorporating the extant literature and research, I found that I was learning from those with whom we were doing research. I was gaining a deeper and more complex understanding of how the system worked and of the challenges faced by those working to educate and prepare students for their futures. And I was learning from the students as well. What were their challenges, their experiences, what did they feel was important and how can we make our efforts more relevant to them in their lives now and in the future?

This new knowledge acquired through being engaged with those with whom we were “researching” began to inform my teaching at the graduate level. I began to incorporate more of my experiences acquired through engaged scholarship in the “real world” in order to make the theories and practices that my students were reading about in books and journals come alive—have real world relevance. I was able to use my struggles and challenges being in the school and working with the teachers and students to develop lesson plans and activities for my graduate students that would better prepare them for their chosen profession. I was using my engaged scholarship (or service) to enhance my teaching but it was also informing my scholarship. Yes, I was thinking more deeply about these issues; I was engaging in more “problem solving”—I was creating new knowledge. I had made it, I was able to justify my engaged scholarship, my service, as scholarship.

Or was I? I recently had a conversation with a colleague about my scholarship and moving toward promotion. In this discussion, the work that Mary Beth and I have been engaging in came up and I was asked about my plans for replicating it in another setting or getting a control group. My heart sank. I guess we still have a long way to go. Though our research to date has been published and the value of our work has been demonstrated, the question remains, is this the type of scholarship that will be recognized “enough” to achieve promotion if we don't replicate it? But would attempting to replicate this work involve moving further away from the engaged scholarship that we have been involved with?

Recently we were reviewing some of the data we've collected from students, in their own words, about their experiences in the school and the impact it has had on them as they move on to the next phase of their educational lives. Though some students didn't make a clear connection between the CI and their development, their words and stories give some inkling into how those experiences in some way contributed to their views about their future in college and in a career. Others, however, were able to distinctly articulate how participating in the Career Institute helped them realize that they had an interest or an ability that they could work toward. This realization, in turn, helped them identify a goal, and this goal enabled them to become more engaged in school and to take more responsibility for their work and for themselves.

Our data is a lot messier than the statistics churned out by a computer program that provides a significance test to determine program “effectiveness.” But, in reviewing our data, I know we have made a difference, that our scholarship has had an impact. Somehow, we got through to some students and they are now facing their futures with a sense of hope, of confidence in themselves, and a sense of determination that they can effect a positive change in their lives. I believe, no, I know that our scholarship has value. It has value in the changes it can effect in the lives of the students being served by it. It has value for me personally as it infuses my work with a sense of purpose and meaning by the real world impact

I have witnessed and it has value professionally as it continues to inform how I think about my scholarship and how I teach in the academy. We are attempting to address the needs of society and the individual. But the only way we can do that is by practicing engaged scholarship. I think we have arrived. Now we need to wait for the academy to catch up with us.

Moving Forward: Embracing Engaged Scholarship

In our narratives we articulate different struggles and future possibilities that may be organized around the framework we created in our review of the literature. The framework helps illuminate and situate our struggles, rewards and future directions. With this in mind, we now revisit and rethink our experiences with engaged scholarship through our framework of research valued by, valued for, and valued with.

Valued By

Both of us struggled to come to terms with our work in the school, building a college and career readiness program, and the kinds of research and scholarship valued by the academy. As Lourdes questioned, is this service or is this scholarship? What we found was that when we put the needs and desires of the community first, the clear path to quantitative research became muddy, and then hopelessly muddled. In order to keep working effectively in the schools we had to develop forbearance, patience, and understanding. Emergencies happened all the time in the school. Staff missed meetings with us, and often the Career Institute activities took a back seat to other immediately pressing issues. Spending time in the school allowed us to build relationships with teachers, staff and students, and so when issues arose such as CI surveys getting lost or misplaced, we understood the issues in the context of busy people working inside of a busy school. We developed insider knowledge of what it meant to work in a secondary school immersed in the high stakes testing environment and the mandatory implementation of the new Common Core State Standards, and we took this knowledge back to our university classrooms where we prepared our students for work in the schools. This insider knowledge was deeply valued by us. More importantly, it was deeply valued by the students whom we teach. Our work in the world is real, as is our service and scholarship.

Valued For

Our narratives also made mention of what our research is “for.” As we see it, the purpose of engaged scholarship was almost immediately evident as students engaged in activities where they learned more about themselves and the world of work. It was immediately evident because both of us taught these first lessons to the first 6th and 7th grade classes. When one of the 6th graders fell asleep, we knew we had to tweak or overhaul the lesson. When a 7th grader commented, with excitement, that he had never thought about the work he would do in terms of what he liked, we rejoiced. We watched their engagement and their enthusiastic participation. As the school grew bigger, our role necessarily shifted away from the classroom. In order to grow the program, we focused on creating lesson plans, offering professional development to teachers and serving as consultants. In short, our scholarship was less hands-on and more unidirectional. It was perhaps no coincidence that the Inquiry School students seemed to be less engaged as well. What we know from engaged scholarship is the importance of participation. And that means spending time in the field, at the school site, maintaining old relationships and forging new ones. As of this writing, we are committed to gaining the participation of students through interviews and focus groups and in other ways not yet imagined. And this leads us to the final point.

Valued With

In our narratives, we spoke about learning from and *with* students. This holds the greatest promise of engaged scholarship from our perspective. Although students’ perspectives were certainly taken into account during the building and studying of the program, there were only a few instances where students actively participated in the creation of ideas and activities for their program. As both of us interview the 12th graders now graduating, we hear how informed, how perceptive they are about what matters to them – and about what seems irrelevant. One student talked about how he didn’t take school seriously until his experience in the CI. Through the CI he found a purpose and goal. Now in grade 12, he’s actively thinking about his college major and career path. He realized, he told us, that he didn’t want “just a job.” He wanted to be excited to get out of bed every morning; he wanted to engage in activities that speak to his interests and abilities. In his words, we see how we can more actively work with and for students in the future; by meeting with students regularly during the program, we see possibilities for mutual learning, mutual respect, and greater participation.

In our stories and in the words of other researchers who have engaged in research “with” others, we understand that in order for service to be personally transformative, professionally rewarding and socially beneficial, there needs to be more to the commitment to service than a desire for tenure or promotion. We need models to go by and voices of communities to be heard and more professors to share their service and scholarship.

The model we propose here may be used as a tool to help community-engaged scholars conceptualize the purpose, goals and aims of the research. The model speaks to themes that emerged both from a review of the literature on engaged scholarship as well as from our reflexive autoethnographies. We submit that community-engaged scholarship must focus its energies and resources on the site or community itself, so that the research questions or issues emerge directly from the needs and desires of the community. Scholarship that is community-engaged examines both the process and product of research and values scholarship that emerges “with” others, has value “for” others, and is valued “by” those impacted most in the community.

When research is done “with, for and by” there emerges a messy overlapping process of scholarship so that service and scholarship evolve as one (Fellner & Siry, 2010). Embracing the idea of engaged scholarship meant that the forces of service and scholarship no longer needed to be separated out—instead, we celebrated as research done “with,” “for” and “by” coalesced into one important goal—community-engaged scholarship. Our personal and professional rewards also coalesced: As the CI program serves students for the greater good, we rejoice in students’ growth and in our scholarly descriptions of their achievements. As Hostetler (2005) says, “Serving people’s well-being is a great challenge, but it is also our greatest calling” (p. 21). Service to the nation and world is what a rich scholarship of engagement is about—one local community at a time.

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