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## The Journey of a Community-Engaged Scholar: An Autoethnography

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# The Journey of a Community-Engaged Scholar: An Autoethnography

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*Community engagement is central to the public and civic mission of a growing number of colleges and universities, and numerous faculty members are applying their expertise to issues of importance to local communities and the larger society. However, there have been few first-hand descriptions of the career paths of faculty who engage in community-engaged scholarship. Faced with the current traditional typology of faculty work—teaching, research, and service—junior faculty in particular are often advised to postpone their community engagement work until after they secure their foundation in research and teaching. The author is a tenured full professor who regards community-engaged scholarship as central to his work. Using an autoethnographic style, he reflects on the motivations, influences, and experiences that have informed his intentional efforts to integrate teaching, research, and service into his professional identity as a community-engaged scholar. His story is an invitation for present and future scholars to view their work through an engaged lens: specifically to think imaginatively about how engaging in pressing social issues and developing respectful and productive relationships with individuals and organizations at the local community level might improve and advance their scholarship. The author's reflections contribute to the theory and practice of community-engaged scholarship by addressing the tensions facing community-engaged scholars as they navigate faculty roles and rewards in higher education.*

**Keywords** Physical education, community engagement, engaged scholarship

## Introduction

During the meeting, the chancellor recognized that junior faculty at our university who work in the community take risks when there are no clear promotion and tenure guidelines that support their community-engaged scholarship. As the meeting wrapped up, he shook my hand and said, “It takes courage to do this work. Thanks for taking the risk.”

(Notes from personal journal, October 2008)

I am a tenured full professor in a College of Education in a doctoral/research university with high research activity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2010). I am in my 18<sup>th</sup> year, and regard community-engaged scholarship as central to my work. In this article I adopt an autoethnographic style to explore the motivations, influences, and experiences that have informed my efforts and my professional identity as a community-engaged scholar (Wellmann, 2000). Community-engaged scholarship is scholarly work undertaken in partnership with communities, draws on multiple sources of knowledge, crosses disciplinary lines, and is reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Holland,

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2005). As such, community-engaged scholarship is different from the scholarly work that professors undertake solely for their disciplines or professional associations because it involves applying one's expertise to practical issues of importance to local communities and the larger society in ways that are consistent with university and unit missions and which fulfill the public purposes of higher education (Percy, Zimpher, & Brukardt, 2006; Rice, 2002). Furthermore, community-engaged scholarship embraces a range of faculty work in communities including teaching (e.g., service-learning), research (e.g., community-based research), and service (e.g., community service, outreach, advocacy) (Calleson, Jordan, & Seifer, 2005).

Examples of community-engaged scholarship in physical education and kinesiology include working with schools to infuse best instructional practices, producing reports or to change policy regarding the number of minutes per week for physical education classes, having one's students present posters in academic venues about physical activity-based service-learning experiences in school and community settings, and writing about such community-engaged scholarship work for scholarly audiences. In recent years, the input of academic press directors, journal editors, granting agencies, and promotion and tenure committees has led to the development of eight standards to assess the scholarly rigor of community-engaged scholars. These standards include: clear academic and community change goals, grounding in the community, rigorous research design, impact on the field and the community, effective dissemination to academic and community audiences, reflective critique, leadership and personal contribution, and consistently ethical behavior (Diamond & Adam, 1993; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997).

While research (e.g., Bloomgarden & O'Meara, 2007) has addressed professors' motivation to undertake community-engaged scholarship, there have been few first-hand descriptions of the career paths of community-engaged scholars. Such descriptions will contribute to the theory and practice of community-engaged scholarship by addressing the tensions facing community-engaged scholars as they navigate faculty roles and rewards in higher education and, in the process, be transformative or catalytic for the author, the reader, and the field of community engagement.

### **Autoethnography and Community-Engaged Scholarship**

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method in which writers draw on their own experiences to connect the personal to the cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The experiences and connections described in this essay concern the path I have taken to undertake community-engaged scholarship in the context of faculty incentives and rewards, particularly promotion and tenure. Autoethnography uses self as a source of data and is increasing being used as a research method of inquiry (Starr, 2010). Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocate autoethnography as a form of autobiographical writing that "make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right" (p. 733). Examples of autoethnographies include reflections on the process of becoming adoptive parents (Wall, 2008), contemplations about the daily life and demands of academic life (Pelias, 2003), and explorations of the part played by gender and age in the process of deciding to pursue a new career at midlife (Klinker & Todd, 2007). While some researchers consider that including the self as the subject of one's own research is self-indulgent or narcissistic (Delamont, 2007; Sparkes, 2002), autoethnographers "ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). As Sparkes states:

This kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement (or lack of it) unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances, the potential for individual and collective restorying is enhanced. (p. 221)

In this essay I borrow concepts from autoethnography to share reflections and recollections of important events and processes which have marked my development as a community-engaged scholar. The research questions that guided this exploration were:

- What experiences and motivations led to my interest in community-engaged scholarship? How were these interests initiated, developed, and sustained?
- What kinds of public products and/or outcomes have I produced and how have these been communicated, reviewed, and validated for quality and legitimacy?
- What barriers and frustrations have I encountered in my work and how did I deal with these?
- What supports enabled me to pursue my community-engaged work?

My purpose in describing the meanings and intentions of my career, the contextual factors that have influenced it, and the significance of my experiences, supports, barriers, and products, is that readers will engage in it personally, and critically reflect on their own knowledge, intuition, and personal experiences as scholars. In this sense my account may nurture the reflective practitioner in readers (Schon, 1983) causing them to reflect on action and reflect in action in order to make sense of and improve their practice as academics who are committed to the public and civic purposes of higher education. Thus, my hope is that this account will interest doctoral students and junior faculty members who are considering becoming engaged or more engaged in community settings as well as more seasoned scholars who are contemplating applying their ideas beyond the walls of the university.

The main data in this study are my recollections and written reflections of my career as it has unfolded, as well as my published and unpublished writings. My analysis consisted of reading through these sources to develop an overall understanding and then to develop issues or themes. The final step involved determining the extent to which these issues and themes connected with and added to the literature on community-engaged scholarship. Thus, in this paper I recount the evolution of my career from graduate school in the 1990s to the present after promotion to full professor. First, I describe my experiences as a doctoral student and consider how they led me to community-engaged scholarship. Next, I discuss my roles and contributions, initially as an untenured assistant professor and then as a tenured associate professor. Finally, I assess my current situation after receiving promotion to full professor and include thoughts about my future. I offer my story to current community-engaged scholars who share similar interests, purposes, and values, in the hope that its authenticity, verisimilitude, and believability will equip them with perspectives and ideas about how to navigate their own community-engaged journey. I also invite present and future scholars to view their work through a community-engaged lens by thinking imaginatively about how engaging in pressing social issues and developing respectful and productive relationships with individuals and organizations at the local community level might improve and advance their scholarship (Peters, Jordan, Adamek, & Alter, 2005). My hope is that my reflections will contribute to the emerging discussion about the theory and practice of community-engaged scholarship by illuminating and interpreting its rewards and challenges.

## Doctoral Studies and my Origins as a Community-Engaged Scholar

This narrative begins in 1989 when, after six years as a physical education teacher in England I began doctoral studies at a university in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. While I didn't fully appreciate it at the time, my experiences during the transition from physical education teacher to professor would provide me with a professional trajectory that I would later follow, and which was initially referred to as the scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1996) and, more recently, community-engaged scholarship (Calleson et al., 2005).

During my doctoral studies, four interrelating factors provided me with a foundation for pursuing a community-engaged agenda. First, during the 1990's a fervent national dialogue was taking place about the public purposes of higher education and the suggestion that institutions forge new and expanded community-university partnerships and incorporate service-learning into their curriculum as an important pedagogy to promote civic responsibility (Percy et al., 2006). A second factor was the steady stream of conversations between faculty and the administration at my institution about making stronger connections between the university and the public, and more specifically about how the university could more effectively work with and serve its urban neighbors.

A third factor in my evolution as a community-engaged scholar was my observations of the successes and failures of the university's "Great Cities Initiative" (see Braskamp & Wergin, 1998 for more detailed observations and analysis). In 1990, several of the university's most respected professors secured substantial funding from a national foundation to roll out a project titled "The Nation of Tomorrow" in partnership with four elementary schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods. However, both the university's experienced professors and younger assistant professors were unprepared for the messiness of building relationships with community partners, as well as the lack of control that typically characterizes more action-oriented research. Furthermore, the institution's "Research 1" promotion and tenure requirements that stressed a high volume of publications in top tier journals contributed to several professors' reluctance to venture out of the university. Faced with the current traditional typology of faculty work—teaching, research, and service—junior faculty in particular were often advised to postpone their community engagement work until after they secured their foundation in research (Percy et al., 2006).

The Nation of Tomorrow project provided me with an early and important lesson about how the cultural characteristics of universities influence professors' commitment to the public service dimension of faculty roles and the respect afforded to it (Maurrasse, 2001). I noticed the mixed messages about what work was most highly respected, with the professors with national reputations receiving considerably more institutional respect than those professors who were engaged in community outreach. In short, the vociferousness of calls for my doctoral institution to be engaged in the community was not matched by large numbers of faculty members engaging in this kind of work. My observations of the pitfalls that can occur when a university engages in community partnerships, coupled with an appreciation of the full responsibilities involved in faculty work provided me with invaluable insights that I would later draw on as a professor.

These more critical insights into the challenges of university-community partnerships were balanced by a fourth factor: exposure to a handful of professors and fellow doctoral students in my institution's colleges of education and kinesiology whose engagement in the community kept my aspirations to engage in similar work alive. These individuals introduced me to the public issues addressed by my doctoral program in curriculum and instruction. One particular issue, the conceptualization and implementation of sport and

physical activity programs to impact the personal and social development of urban children and youth, was the most significant element of my doctoral education. These programs were based on the premise that sport and physical activity have the potential to teach children and youth how to be more responsible and caring individuals. Research has shown that these programs can help children and youth develop a sense of personal values and responsibility to others, as well as instill leadership capacity and a more positive view of their futures (Hellison, 2003). My doctoral advisor, Don Hellison, was my first role model for community-engaged scholarship. He had established a teaching and research program that provided his graduate students with valuable learning experiences and promoted their growth both as teachers and scholars. My participation in his program included 20 hours of weekly involvement in a community partnership supported by The Nation of Tomorrow project. My role was to teach physical activity-based after school programs and physical education classes in an urban elementary school; tasks that occupied much of my attention during five years of doctoral work. My experiences in the school became the backdrop for discussions about expectations for faculty, exposure to scholarly work to serve the public good, and opportunities to initiate my own community-engaged scholarship for publication. A note in my journal from that period reflects the value of these discussions: "I am beginning to see how research and service are no longer fragmented but can become essential and integrated functions of both doctoral students' and university professors' work."

Looking back, my doctoral studies provided me with some useful insights about my potential role as a professor and provided a vision for the professional life to which I aspired. I was excited about the important and interesting issues in the world to which my disciplines of urban education and physical education could make a contribution. However, I was aware both of the danger of being pulled in many different directions and uncertain as to whether the demands of promotion and tenure would compete with the kind of practical work that I valued. In retrospect, I realize that this uncertainty was productive as it generated some useful insights and, as my doctoral program drew to a close and I applied for faculty positions, my application materials reflected my professorial identity as a physical educator who would strive to embed his teaching, research, and service work in the urban community. In my application letters, and four job presentations and interviews I explained that I had sought out projects and experiences outside the normal boundaries of doctoral programs, including teaching part-time in the urban elementary school and directing after school physical activity programs. My explanation must have had some weight because after receiving my doctorate in 1994 I joined a college of education in a doctoral research university (Carnegie Foundation, 2010) in a large metropolitan area in the Rocky Mountain Region as a tenure-track assistant professor in curriculum and instruction.

### **Setting a Community-Engaged Path as a New Professor**

As a new professor I was enthusiastic, passionate and, on reflection, rather idealistic about how I would make a contribution to the two disciplines that encompassed my work—urban education and physical education. My six-year quest for tenure was dominated by searching for balance, integration, and opportunity within the academy to find meaning in my work and to make the kind of contributions that I envisioned. Three aspects of my work during those six years became the means by which I found meaning and strived to become a community-engaged scholar: teaching, publishing, and presenting about my community-based programs; developing a university-community partnership; and undertaking community-based research.



Teaching, publishing, and presenting about my community-based programs were a natural extension of my doctoral experience and essential if my work was to result in products that would count in the promotion and tenure process. Immediately on arriving at my new institution I found a school in which to continue the after school sport and physical activity programs that I had taught as a doctoral student. The school was situated in a Hispanic community and the principal suggested that 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who had difficulty with social relationships and academics would benefit from the program. During the next 6 years approximately 100 elementary students participated in my after school program twice a week and this environment provided me with an invaluable laboratory for scholarship. I situated my presentations and publications within Schon's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner, the teacher as researcher framework (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990), service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999), and qualitative methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My writing stressed that my work was not merely a service activity but also applied, scholarly research. I wrote about the effectiveness of my teaching strategies on the elementary students' personal and social responsibility, as well as middle school students' leadership qualities (e.g., Cutforth, 1997, 2000). This line of research resulted in six peer-reviewed articles that addressed physical activity and youth development. Four of the articles were published in physical education and kinesiology journals, while the other outlets were an urban studies journal and an interdisciplinary journal. During this period I also published two other articles from my dissertation (unrelated to my after school program) in curriculum and instruction and teacher education journals.

Developing a university-community partnership also contributed to my pursuit of community-engaged scholarship. My community outreach efforts during my first year as a professor had focused solely on my after school program. However, regular conversations with students, parents, teachers, and administrators at the elementary school made me aware that the surrounding community faced all of the challenges associated with urban areas in the United States, and that these social and educational needs extended far beyond my after school program. Thus, I began conversations with colleagues in my college and the university's service-learning department about how the university might extend its human and technical resources and skills to the needs of the schools and neighborhood.

In 1995, these colleagues and I discussed the merits of developing a partnership with the principal of the elementary school. She thought it was a good idea and suggested that we also gauge the interest of two other neighborhood schools—an adjacent elementary school and the middle school in the school district's feeder system—in such a partnership. During subsequent monthly planning meetings we explored ways in which the knowledge and skills of college of education faculty and students might match the needs of the schools and the community. In late-1995, we formed the Northwestside Community Partnership. Our initial offerings in the three schools mainly involved undergraduate students in service-learning placements and providing after school tutoring, computer classes for adults, and recreation programs. During these early meetings I drew on my observations from my doctoral work of the challenges faced by the Great Cities Initiative at my doctoral institution. The partnership focused on building relationships among community, school, and university people, and providing programs and activities that were based on the community's needs and resources rather than the lofty vision of academia (Braskamp & Wergin, 1998). In collaboration with our school and community partners, my colleagues in the service-learning department and I applied for and received grants from the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Improve Corps (WEPIC) Program and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to support the development of a neighborhood center at the middle school. These funding sources were instrumental

in sustaining the Northwest Community Partnership and enhancing its reputation in the schools, the urban community, and beyond.

While coordinating the partnership, I played multiple and shifting roles which included both supportive and directive actions. On occasions I walked the fine line of not wanting to presume to know what would be best for the schools but not wanting to withhold ideas or betray my ideals either (Prins, 2006; Stoecker, 1999). At times this meant ensuring that the university voice was not silenced in favor of community perspectives while always respecting our partners' knowledge and authority. I believe that my modeling equitable ways of working influenced how our community partners (school and community-based organizations staff, community residents, children, and youth) perceived the university as an institution and how they received other faculty, staff, and students, especially whose plans were not fully articulated or skills honed (Liederman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2003). On a more practical level, in addition to teaching my after school program, my role in the partnership was to strive for a community-driven, power-sharing model so that projects—whether initiated by the community or the university—were rooted in our partners' visions. My other roles included envisioning possibilities for community projects, serving as a broker between university personnel (faculty, staff, and students), and connecting them to financial resources to support the projects (Prins, 2006).

The third aspect of my quest to pursue community-engaged scholarship, community-based research (CBR), emerged from the Northwestside Community Partnership. During the early years of the partnership the university's efforts were focused solely on providing the direct services that I mentioned earlier, and our efforts were generally valued and appreciated by our community partners, as well as our students, staff, and faculty. However, in 1997 our partners' need for research assistance caused me to move in a new direction, CBR, which is a research model in which faculty, students, and community partners collaborate to address shared questions with research projects (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). Our community partners needed research to accomplish their goals, whether to conduct a needs assessment, to provide a program evaluation to funders, or to include supporting data in a grant proposal. CBR had the potential to deepen our partnerships because research projects completed in this paradigm are designed to address an issue or need identified by a community partner organization or for a population served by such an organization (Strand et al., 2003).

Fortunately, my move to embrace CBR coincided with an initiative being led by a Princeton-based foundation to establish a group of higher education institutions that were interested in developing CBR classes. My institution was invited to join this collaboration comprising an eclectic group of colleges and universities, including a community college, a research university, a prestigious historically Black college, an Ivy League school, a private women's college, a public liberal arts college, and my institution—a private doctoral research institution. Despite their differences, all these institutions were making a new and exciting commitment to their surrounding communities. From 1997–2003, the foundation's funding enabled me to take a course release each year and offer an annual CBR class to graduate students across the college of education. This class offered a unique niche for graduate students committed to social justice and interested in conducting applied research with our community partners. Through teaching the class, I experienced first-hand the impact of community-based teaching and research not only on my students but also on the community. This experience led to the realization that CBR allowed me to align my beliefs about the importance of engaging with communities with the expectations of higher education. In other words, it was the ideal venue in which to integrate the traditional domains of research, teaching, and service into community-engaged scholarship.



Having described how I set my path, I suggest four strategies for junior faculty members, especially those at institutions with rigorous tenure requirements, who might be worried about how to establish a community-engaged scholarship agenda. First, start engaging with community partners early because building trusting relationships, and designing and implementing successful teaching and research projects takes time. Even if a new faculty member is trained in traditional research, spending time in community settings listening to local people's experiences and concerns will enable her or him to take "baby steps" as a community-engaged scholar by identifying viable teaching and research projects, the products that are likely to emerge (e.g., forums, workshops, reports, curricula, guides, technical assistance, policy development), and their potential impact on individuals and communities. Second, ensure that your work is scholarly relevant. Conference presentations, articles, grants, and competitive contracts will result if your community-engagement efforts are located within pertinent intellectual and practical questions. Third, document everything (e.g., meeting notes, artifacts, research instruments) so that you will be able to track the development of your work and describe your community-engaged scholarship process when writing annual reviews and preparing for promotion and tenure. Finally, when possible, make your contribution clear to others by aligning your community-engaged scholarship with disciplinary, departmental, campus and/or national priorities.

### **The Influence of Supports and Barriers on an Untenured Community-Engaged Scholar**

At this point in the autoethnography, as I reflect on my emergence as a community-engaged scholar and consider some broader issues that transpired during the early stages of my journey, the focus shifts from the personal to the institutional, in order to reflect the link between micro and macro contexts. Several supports and barriers were present during my pre-tenure years. My supportive doctoral experience with Don Hellison had provided me with the ability to capitalize on the changing landscape surrounding the civic mission and public role of universities, as well as the expansion of service-learning. Consequently, my work developed in a fairly integrated fashion, beginning with my after school program, continuing with the Northwestside Community Partnership, and extending into CBR. These community connections provided me with a venue for publications, as well as a CBR teaching focus. But serendipity played a supportive role too. My efforts in the community were helped considerably by the availability of federal, national, and local funding that reflected the growing higher education/school/community partnership movement. For example, the national legislation that created a funding stream for service-learning through Learn and Serve America supported my programs that introduced teacher education students to service-learning in one of the city's elementary schools, the development of the middle school neighborhood center mentioned earlier, and CBR with various school and community partners. At the national level, the Northwest Community Partnership attracted the interest of the University of Pennsylvania and for six years the partnership was part of consortium of a dozen universities and colleges that received funding through Penn's WEPIC program. These grants provided me with an annual course release and the necessary time to fully commit to partnership development. Consequently I did not have to teach classes that weren't central to my interests, and those that I did teach were all connected to my interests in urban education, youth development, and CBR. Additionally, students chose to participate in my community programs, and my CBR class and research opportunities. This was a huge advantage

because by choosing to participate, they accepted the challenges involved and largely thrived.

A key reason why my career as a community-engaged scholar developed in a fairly integrated fashion during my pre-tenure years was the support that I received beyond my home institution by colleagues and institutional networks which enabled me to stay in and increase the quality of my practice. As I mentioned earlier, as an assistant professor, my college of education colleagues never undermined my community work; neither did they actively support it. This could have led to feelings of loneliness and isolation and yearning for community that new faculty report (Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). However, in 1996, just two years after I became professor, Don Hellison established the Urban Youth Development Partnership that comprised six professors who were all directing their own community-based physical activity programs. From 1996–2003, this group met annually at a member's institution for several days to discuss each other's work. These meetings resulted in the group producing several products, including workshops in the US and abroad, individual and joint writing projects, and the publication of several articles, book chapters, and a book (Hellison et al., 2000). Each member's values conflicted to varying degrees with their institutions' missions and emphases, but the partnership provided each with support and affirmation for their own professional vision. The connection, caring, and intellectual support provided by partnership members for my community-engaged agenda, as well as the opportunity to pursue scholarship were crucial factors both in my development as an assistant professor and in my being tenured.

A related support for my community-engaged scholarship was the institutional networks created by the funding received from the University of Pennsylvania and the same Princeton-based foundation for the Northwestside Community Partnership. These networks comprised individuals representing over 20 higher education institutions that were involved in school and community partnerships and/or CBR. The opportunity to learn from these individuals and to share successes and struggles made up for the lack of active support from my college of education colleagues. Indeed the personal and professional relationships formed through the foundation network led to a group of us working on a book on CBR that would later be published (Strand et al., 2003).

As far as barriers are concerned, during my six years as an assistant professor two factors inhibited my development as a community-engaged scholar. First, the lack of institutional support for community engagement at my institution meant that with the exception of one senior colleague who became involved in the Northwestside Community Partnership, I was the only professor in the college of education who was involved in community-based programs. My colleagues watched my work from a distance, and because none chose to participate in projects associated with the partnership, my work was carried out largely in isolation. Second, when it became time for my mid-tenure review in 1997, my colleagues largely ignored my community work. Indeed, the promotion and tenure committee's major recommendation was that I should present more papers at peer-reviewed, disciplinary-based conferences like the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and to publish in top tier journals. While following this advice and presenting my dissertation research at AERA, I didn't deviate from teaching and writing about my community-based programs, sustaining the Northwestside Community Partnership, and undertaking CBR projects. Nevertheless, I was relieved when two education/urban education journals accepted two manuscripts because I knew the promotion and tenure committee would regard these articles as higher quality than those I had published in the fields of physical education and kinesiology.

## Community-Engaged Scholarship and Promotion and Tenure

Despite my publication record, the successes of the Northwestside Community Partnership, and an emerging track record in providing CBR projects for our local community partners, three years later, when the time came for my promotion and tenure review, it became clear that several of the promotion and tenure committee members still didn't fully understand the nature of the work that I had been doing. This is hardly surprising considering that they came from very diverse disciplines and training and, like almost all other institutions, my institution followed the three criteria of research, teaching, and service to evaluate and reward faculty performance. Despite public comments to the contrary, these elements weren't evenly weighted, and research published in reputable peer-reviewed journals was constantly emphasized as being paramount to successful promotion. While I saw my scholarship as blending academic research with the reflective practice emanating from my community-based physical activity programs, several of the committee possessed a narrow view of professional work typically undertaken by education professors (Nyquist, Woodford, & Rogers, 2004) and viewed my work more as service. Six of my eight peer-reviewed articles addressed issues concerning youth development and physical activity programs (the other two stemmed from my dissertation), four were qualitative accounts of my after-school program, one discussed the characteristics of effective after-school programs, and one advocated that the physical education field should embrace service-learning. These articles were published in a range of journals but the promotion and tenure committee considered only two—the *Urban Review* and the *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*—as upper-tier journals in the field of education. The other journals were not as highly regarded because they were interdisciplinary in nature (e.g., the *Journal of Peace Psychology*), or geared towards professors of physical education and kinesiology (e.g., *Quest*), or read by teacher education professors or practicing teachers (e.g., the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*).

On one occasion when my promotion and tenure review was in progress a senior colleague on the promotion and tenure committee visited my office and asked, "What exactly do you do?" I explained that for the past six years I had taught my own community program, formed the Northwestside Community Partnership, received 13 grants totaling over \$140,000 to support my work in the community, and published 8 articles. Yet this senior colleague didn't know much about the work involved in community partnerships or the fields of physical education and urban education, and she wasn't familiar with the journals in which I had published. Ironically, it wasn't until I showed her the drawer containing files of the grants that I had received that she expressed some understanding of my work; but then only in a superficial light and she didn't probe much or stay long. Her quick exit from my office caused me to wonder whether she had initially viewed my work solely as service rather than as research, teaching, and program development within the community; perhaps the fact that I had received funding gave my work credibility in her eyes.

However, in 2000 my application for tenure and promotion to associate professor was successful and came, as far as I can tell, with little, if any, controversy. I was fortunate that the outside reviewers of my promotion and tenure portfolio were familiar with my scholarship and embraced the notion of professors working in the community. I have since been told that their letters emphasized the relevance of my work, both within the academy and to society, as applied scholarship that demonstrated innovation in the significant social issue of urban youth development and showed potential for replication in other communities—features which are related to community-engaged scholarship's emphasis on impact on the

field and the community. Ultimately, I believe that their comments were instrumental in the positive outcome.

### **Tensions Between Engaging with the Community and Producing Community-Engaged Scholarship**

As I continued my community-engaged scholarship journey as an associate professor, distinctions between research, teaching, and service blurred as I engaged in opportunities to pursue issues and questions that I cared and sought to learn about. It became difficult to tell where my research, teaching, and service left off and began, especially when I was involved in CBR. I became entrepreneurial and a risk taker in obtaining grants and contracts from local non-profit organizations, state agencies, and local and national foundations that involved cutting edge work collaborating with community residents on research but didn't have obvious publication potential. My teaching drew on my own research and outreach and I encouraged my students to participate in their own learning agendas in the community. I learned as much from my students working on their research projects as they did from me.

As an associate professor, I focused on deepening my work in the community—expanding existing and initiating new community partnerships, teaching CBR classes, incorporating service-learning into other classes, building a CBR network, and conducting and supervising CBR projects. For example, CBR opportunities for students expanded to include a variety of practicum, internship, and paid research opportunities. During my 8 years as an associate professor, over 75 students conducted CBR projects that addressed many different kinds of social issues, including inequity in schools, immigration and employment, youth development outcomes in extended day programs, and the effectiveness of community change projects. As I noted in one of my annual reviews, “The professional and personal aspects of my community work are intertwined. Our CBR projects have earned the trust of community folks which has meant that the local community has ended up being an incredible career home for me.”

I found that CBR offered a unique niche for students interested in applied research with a social change agenda. As one student put it, “I didn't realize that you could do social justice research in a doctoral program!” These students were usually already interested in and committed to social justice and motivated to conduct research in diverse settings that had an opportunity to make an immediate difference for marginalized individuals and groups. Several students wrote their doctoral dissertations on their CBR projects and all students were challenged by the complexity of the relationship-building and research tasks associated with CBR. My experience taught me that CBR initiatives cannot be successful without flexible, talented students who are motivated to make a difference for their community partners through research and who are willing to gain the skills necessary for project completion (Strand et al., 2003).

Week after week as an associate professor I attended meetings with community partners to talk about the progress of CBR projects, as well as to socialize; indeed this expenditure of time and personal attention became second nature to me. While I was aware that the practical and philosophical issues involved in my community work would make timely journal articles, the time that I could have committed to writing was instead consumed by building the CBR work at the university. My writing efforts were limited to coauthoring the CBR text and a handful of articles with others.

During my first six years as an associate professor, when faced with the dilemma of choosing between continuing my community work or reducing or suspending it in order

to devote the time and energy to writing about it, my community work won out. Simply put because of the complex layers of relationships and organizations, I didn't feel able to tell my partners in effect, "My time with you will be less for a while because I need to write about this stuff in order to get promoted." Nevertheless, in my seventh year as an associate professor, when I assessed whether my publication record would make me a strong candidate for promotion to full professor, I realized that I needed one or two more publications to make this more likely. As I wrote in my 2006 annual review,

While I supervise numerous CBR projects and write grants, if I am to apply for promotion to full professor I will need to prioritize among my numerous roles and return to writing peer reviewed articles after a 2-year hiatus. I expect to be focusing more of my time in this area.

This realization brought to light the tension that I had been feeling between the doing of community-based work and the documenting of it as community-engaged scholarship. Put simply, I found it impossible to bring my knowledge and expertise to issues in the community and simultaneously produce the publications that would ensure my promotion to full professor and thus my progress in the academy.

During that seventh year I resolved this dilemma and overcame my reluctance to disengage temporarily from my community work when I decided to apply for the sabbatical that had actually been available to me since my promotion to associate professor six years previously. Going on sabbatical would necessitate me letting my students, colleagues, and community partners know that I would be less visible because I needed to do some sustained writing. These individuals understood and respected my wish, and consequently for seven months I largely removed myself from my community-based work and focused on writing about my experiences for publication.

The truth is that I enjoyed this brief hiatus from the community and reveled in the more traditional role of producing empirical research articles. I found that the lessons learned from my teaching and community work contributed to several gaps in the literature. In terms of my teaching, these gaps included the impact of CBR classes on students' learning. I had gathered students' reflection papers from my CBR classes, and these suggested that my classes were contexts in which students explored to varying degrees and, on occasions, haphazardly, how they think and feel, and that they consider what is important to them and why in ways that they rarely experience in other classes. But the precise details of what students learned from CBR classes remained unanswered empirically; thus, one of my writing projects during my sabbatical focused on the extent of students' understanding of research methods and disciplinary knowledge; their professional and career preparation, commitment to civic responsibility, and appreciation of diversity; and the promotion of prosocial behaviors, moral development, and leadership qualities. After conducting focus groups with students who had taken CBR classes I coauthored a technical report that was posted on a national community-based research network initiative's website. This report led to the development of a national survey to assess student learning outcomes in CBR and was later published as a journal article (Lichtenstein, Thorne, Cutforth, & Tombari, 2011). I also found that the lessons learned from my community work had the potential to contribute to the university-community partnership literature, specifically the methods and outcomes of community engagement practices. Over the years I had kept detailed reflection notes of my community partnership work and these provided fertile ground for scholarship. One paper that I worked on during my sabbatical was subsequently published in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*.



Thus, lessons learned from my teaching and community partnership work occupied my writing energies while on sabbatical. I applied for promotion to full professor in 2008–2009 and after successfully negotiating this hurdle I returned to active involvement in the community, but with a more balanced approach to managing the dilemma of doing community work and writing about the doing. In addition, I threw myself into the important work of institutionalizing community engagement in my institution's college of education.

Embarking on the next stage of my career as a community-engaged scholar I coordinated a two-year college-wide conversation about how community-engaged scholarship should be framed, valued, documented, and rewarded which resulted in the revision of the promotion and tenure policy in the college of education. The new policy ([http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf\\_files/APT\\_policy\\_Final\\_May\\_18\\_2009.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/APT_policy_Final_May_18_2009.pdf).) drew on the literature to incorporate criteria for evaluating the quality of faculty members' community-based scholarly products and the extent to which they communicate original, innovative knowledge and theoretical insights that possess both academic and public value.

Currently, I am fortunate to be able to combine my two passions, physical education and community-based research, to tackle the problem of children's limited access to quality physical education opportunities in the San Luis Valley in rural Colorado. From 2008–2010, I co-led a community planning process with school and district administrators, physical education teachers, community health practitioners, and university researchers that resulted in a grant proposal that was funded by a local foundation. This funding began in October 2010 and supports a 3-year professional development intervention designed to improve the quality of physical education and build physically active lifestyles in low income students in rural Colorado (Cutforth & Belansky, 2011).

### **Reflections on my Journey as a Community-Engaged Scholar and on the Promise of Autoethnography**

Our professional work has its own publics, history, and current issues and community-engaged scholars use a variety of skills, capacities, and dispositions. These include patience and persistence; organizing skills such as listening and meshing self-interests, convening and facilitation skills; and the disposition to simultaneously pursue civic and academic purposes in ways that are effective, respectful, and productive. My doctoral experience provided me with some preparation that helped me get established as a novice practitioner in the area of community-engaged scholarship. My advisor, Don Hellison, worked collaboratively with his graduate students to address practical issues and concerns in our community programs and pursue new knowledge. His mentoring taught me that advisors of community-engaged graduate students must be willing to relinquish power dynamics and hierarchy that often characterize advisor-advisee relationships and instead become co-learners, co-educators, and co-generators of knowledge (Jaeger, Sandmann, & Kim, 2011).

My preparation for community-engaged scholarship is a reminder that graduate school is the venue that serves to socialize future professors for their faculty careers (Austin & Barnes, 2005; Rice et al., 2000; Trower, Austin, & Sorcinelli, 2001). Graduate programs should provide their students with concrete understandings of the roles and responsibilities of colleges and universities to the broader society and the ways those responsibilities can be carried out by faculty members. Clearly community-engaged scholarship is not for everyone, but I believe that more future professors should be equipped to begin their academic careers with a vision and direction for how they might pursue a life of community-engaged



scholarship (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005). The words of Ernest Boyer (1990) recognize the important groundwork that graduate education can potentially provide. Boyer wrote,

The work of higher learning, at the core, is and must remain disciplined inquiry and critical thought. Still, future scholars should be asked to think about the usefulness of knowledge, to reflect on the social consequences of their work, and in so doing gain understanding of how their own study relates to the world beyond the campus. (p. 68)

As a professor, my community work has taken place within and outside my fields of physical education, curriculum and instruction, urban education and, more recently, rural education, and operated in circles whose leaders recognize the need for stronger connections between universities and the public and who are supportive of professors who move in that direction. The rewards and challenges that I have encountered are reminders that it is not easy to undertake and sustain community-engaged scholarship, even for scholars who work in an applied academic field like physical education and kinesiology that one would expect to support it. However, I have never questioned my decision to build my professional identity around community-engaged scholarship. While it often occurs under conditions of uncertainty it is integral to my pursuit of the core academic missions of teaching and research because it influences and affects people's lives.

Community-engaged faculty members serve on the front line of their institutions' mission to be engaged partners with the needs of local communities and the larger society. Their work promotes and builds stronger relationships between the academy and the community and enhances higher education institutions' reputation and image. These scholars recognize the opportunity community-engaged scholarship provides to bring together diverse groups of "knowers" to produce the knowledge that society needs to address complex problems such as the childhood obesity epidemic and lack of access to quality physical education. Their engagement in the community informs and reinforces their sense of purpose as professors: one that recognizes the diversity of scholarly activity and emphasizes the connections between theory and practice, the importance of communicating research knowledge to students, and valuing the implications of scholarly work for the world beyond the academy.

Today, community engagement is emerging as an unofficial movement or calling for higher education, and numerous universities value and recognize community-engaged scholarship in their promotion and tenure process. However, in other (mainly research) universities junior scholars often take the same risk referred to by my chancellor at the beginning of this article and are anxious, nervous, and worried about getting tenure, especially with rigorous publication demands. However, even those professors who work in institutions that don't fully value and recognize community-engaged scholarship in the promotion and tenure process are supported in their efforts by a variety of resources (see, for example, Franz, 2011) that provide best practices for conducting and assembling community-engaged scholarship. In explaining the "fit" between their disciplinary homes and their community-engaged scholarship, obviously junior faculty should pay close attention to their own institution's promotion and tenure criteria but should also examine the standards developed by Diamond and Adams (1993) and Glassick et al. (1997) which are listed at the beginning of this article.

Furthermore, organizations such as Campus-Community Partnerships for Health ([www.ccph.info](http://www.ccph.info)) have developed reports and toolkits that recognize and reward

community-engaged scholarship in the promotion and tenure process. These resources have been instrumental in explaining the principles and best practices of community-engaged scholarship to colleagues; promotion and tenure committees; deans, provosts, chancellors, and presidents; and disciplinary associations.

Borrowing from the autoethnographic style of writing, this essay recounted my experience on my journey as a community-engaged scholar as I navigated the constraints and facilitating factors embedded in faculty incentives and rewards in higher education. I hope that this account speaks to community-engaged scholars about their own experience and will shed light on their journey of personal growth and their search for unity and individual meaning (Palmer, 2010; Richardson, 2000). Not only did this writing experience provide me with valuable theoretical knowledge as I turned to the literature to support my reflections, but it also engendered an enduring commitment to community-engaged scholarship as a powerful contributor both to the intellectual life of the academy and to the quality of life in the local community. The field of community engagement would benefit from more stories of success and struggle that have played a part in shaping who community-engaged scholars are and what they do. These stories can help community-engaged scholars “make new sense of situations of uncertainty or uniqueness” (Schon, 1983, p. 61) while also helping us identify and scrutinize the assumptions that frame our work and ultimately improve our practice.

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