Griffith University field education project

“Building bridges within the differences”

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1 Field education project:

We live in compound and multiple societies, where we meet people with different backgrounds, health conditions, values and attitudes. The school is one of the most important arenas where children interact and learn skills in socialisation. The school environment touches the life of every child and therefore provides an opportunity for community to manifest and grow.

“Building bridges within the differences”.

The journey for building bridges is the main purpose of community development. Building a bridge strong enough not to break down and welcome all. One of the many ways St. Paul’s school is undertaking is through a new model of schooling and school community named St. Paul’s School Community Partnerships that aims to welcome and offer open access for all students, families, staff and community members. They provide an environment that welcomes and encourages all community members to be active participants. The role of Community Partnerships encourages flexible approaches for educating children who are experiencing difficulty learning in the classroom, having difficulties with their behaviour or are experiencing disadvantage in their lives. Sometimes the students may leave the classroom and learn other skills and knowledge with the Community Development Worker or School Cultural Development Worker.

Children with disabilities¹ present with many challenges within the school environment. Many students find their lunch breaks difficult, due to problems coping in the playground and a lack of social skills. During my practical placement at the Community Centre, which is situated at St. Paul’s school, I’ve seen the relevance for strengthening these relationships. The school has many fiscal spaces for the students to be, but do the students themselves have positive experiences during their breaks in these spaces? To carry out this, I’ve found it reasonable to ask students themselves for their opinion, and try to create a “bottom up approach” that’s based on working with, rather than for.

“I spend most of my time at the Community Centre, because I don’t have any friends. I often get angry, so the students hate me. I don’t have any feelings. I only feel anger.” A boy who generally comes to the Community Centre said this to me when I asked what
he likes to do during lunch times.

What can sustain the students with disabilities through lunch breaks?

1.1 Implementation - what is possible?
Empowerment in this context is about mobilising and making use of the students own resources in order that they may feel that they are able to cope and have influence and control. This constitutes a special challenge when working, because of their young age many have difficulties expressing their own wishes and needs. They may not understand the consequences of their own choices, what they need to do for having a better lunch time etc. Community Development work emphasises the significance of empowerment, developing organic processes for making meaningful connections.

A process like this may move through 4 different stages: micro-, mezzo-, macro- and meta method (Burkett and Kelly 2006) which is foundational in Community Development theory. This is a passionate, considered, purposeful and effective way of working – from private concern to public action.

- **Micro method:** A good foundation is listening to and validating the individuals' stories. An example of this may be having a discussion about bullying. It is important to create an environment that encourages people towards possibly taking action when they see people being mistreated, which provides a platform for discovering and developing shared values. What better way is there to prevent future problems than to start with the future: the children? In sharing values about respect and acknowledging a shared vision aids in strengthening community identity.

- **Mezzo method:** Furthermore collectively bonding will build up the goal approach. Fundamental to community development practice is the 0-1-3 model. At this level we’re sharing the individual stories. This concept is based on the reality that when you are alone there are zero relationships. When you are with another there is one relationship, but when there are three, there are three relationships. The intention is to achieve as many 013 relationships as possible, because then they are a part of something bigger (ibid).

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1 With disabilities I represent the marginalized, misbehaving and disengaged students.
• **Macro method:** This step moves the process of private concern to public action into ‘organised action’ and whole of community ownership. This may eventuate through a working party to engage the students, relatives and staff to come up with ideas for what can be done, and maybe find solutions and actions to shared issues.

• **Meta method:** Furthermore the work must be linked to a context. A new or enhanced infrastructure with shared purpose and shared responsibility.

It must be said, models are a fragment of the reality. It is good to have a description of how to build a bridge, but in practice it will never follow it literally. Throughout this process it may be important to have a circle of reflection: what has been done, what was positive/negative, and what would be done differently for future direction.

**2. Detailed description of the project:**

The research proposed in this paper is based upon observations of the school area, students’ questionnaire, and informal talks with children and staff. In order for my goal to be reached I had to get acquainted with the school system and what kind of options the students had for their breaks, and most importantly build relationships.

The school day begins at 08:45 am and finishes at 15:00 pm. During this time they have two breaks, little lunch at 10:45 to 11:15 am and big lunch at 13:10 to 13:45 pm. I had to take part in these, to observe their social behaviour and needs. My main observations were four students; three boys and one girl, who have special needs. I conducted two observations, on different days, for each child. After the breaks I recorded the location, the student’s behaviour, the answers to the subsequent questions and my own reflection of the setting. The fact that my observations were in the schoolyard, I was often dragged into conversations and activities with other students and it became more like “participating observation”. I structured observations in a way that I knew what I was looking for and how to get the answer to my problem question. By adopting a genuine bottom up approach I was able to collect a quantity of quality data by making a questionnaire for the students, along with quality observations and informal talks with the students. When using both methods it’s called methods triangle (Jacobsen 2003). I’ve also had talks and questionnaire with other students about their thoughts for a better school environment and what they could think of sustaining them for their breaks (see attachment). The answers were similar to the students with disabilities. Furthermore I will
introduce the range of facilities, resources and activities the students have to date, thereby some of the students own comments about what they believe would make the breaks better and where they don’t like to be during lunch time

Options to date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Little lunch: 10:45 to 11:15 am.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Children with needs can come to the Community Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Library access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sports oval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Basketball/tennis court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to the garage with the balls, toys etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sandpit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big lunch: 13:10 to 13:45 am.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Community Garden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Library access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sports oval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Basketball/tennis court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to the garage with the balls, toys etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sandpit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you could choose anything, what would you like to do for your lunch time?

“The lunch breaks would be nicer if the adults were participating in the games”.

“Friendship teams”. “I want a big teenager playground with climbing walls”. “I want longer breaks… and to have a computer lab with internet access”. “I want to play with the older students”. “Plondery, a spot to sit on”. “An art wall, build and colour a wall”. “Food day, get some people to bring out food for everyone”. “A place where I can practice my gymnastics.” “Get chocolate bar for free”. “I would like trees to climb in”. “Play Gridiron”. “Have more activity contests”. “I like to play with Brownie” (chickens in the community garden).
What part of school don’t you like during lunch time? And why don’t you like it?

“I don’t like the park, because they don’t let me play”. “The oval, because it’s boring, and there aren’t any playground there”. “I don’t like the oval, because I always get hit by the balls”. “I don’t like the younger kids”. “The playground because there are always problems happening there”. “I don’t like the classroom, because the work upsets me”. “Tennis court, because I don’t really play in it”. “The sandpit, because it dirties me and I hate sand”. “It upsets me that I don’t have friends”. “Sitting out upsets me”.

Furthermore I implemented the individuals’ stories to a 6/7 class with 21 students. They have had sessions about homelessness, love and the hierarchy of needs pyramid of Maslow. It was a good opportunity to put this project into practice. We made our own pyramid of needs in the playground, a map of the schoolyard where they painted green for the spots they felt safe, and red for the spots they felt unsafe. We also facilitated some activities where the kids acted out what they can do for building positive relationships. For future directions the students will develop individual projects to help make the playground a positive space and time for all students.

3. The relevance of the project to the organisation:

It is not easy to see the goal being reached within this area, and it’s impossible to get a lasting implementation in such a short time. However the project may be continued after I leave. The importance of this is the students’ well being at school. Every child should have the opportunity to go to school, and therefore the school service has to offer many options in meeting every child at their level. First of all, it examines that kids get more out of learning at school if they enjoy staying there (Nybø 2001). Secondly what better way to create an environment for relationships education that circles against primary prevention? Thirdly it may reduce the staff involvement if the needy students get included with the rest of the students. By contrast I don’t believe in removing the adults from their breaks. But they can use their capacity to other things with the students. This will be explained below within the theoretical framework. Fourthly, the children are becoming institutionalized (Bo 2000), and for this the teachers have more responsibility in raising them. The children are spending much of their childhood and youth away from home. A vital point of relevance is the importance of a positive school experience and the impact on children’s behaviour at home, development and healthy growth in the broader context. Hence the use of the term, ‘life-giving learning’ that is used at St. Paul’s.
4. The theoretical framework used to undertake the project:
The theoretical framework that I have chosen to combine this project into a meaningful context is 1) the trialectic relationships by Burkett and Kelly. The methodology of community development speaks about genuine connections between people that develop quality of life. 2) The theory of Erik Eriksen has allowed me to be able to identify the stage of development that a particular child is up to and then be able to set realistic expectations for them. Another framework is 3) Bronfenbrenner with his theory about “ecological systems”. One of the many things this model is telling is that relationships are very important. 4) System theory (Ekeland 2004) has also been important, as many students are having “crossover” within different cultures. The theory tells us that if a family is practising rules that are not acquainted with other systems the child is participating with (school and community), this may cause conflict for the child. For the parents it may be important to contain their own culture, but after a while their children will seek their own identity from the culture they grow up from. This may create conflicts, because the children need something that is stable and predictable. Furthermore 5) the essence of the self, according to Mead, is its reflexivity. The individual self is individual only because of its relation to others. Through the individual's ability to take in his imagination the attitudes of others, his self becomes an object of his own reflection (Evenshaug and Hallen 2000). This makes me put extra effort in meeting the students, as well as others.

5. The success of the project:
Hopefully this knowledge has been helpful for the school. My personal development within the area community development has been huge, and I’m grateful towards my supervisor and others that have given me the inspiration and opportunity to grow. Some of the success was the good relationships between me and the kids. I’ve also gained knowledge about the school system, and how to work with children with disabilities.

The impacts of this project for members of St. Paul’s school community are raising awareness about the personal experiences of children during playtime. This awareness has brought playtime onto the agenda for staff and leadership meetings. The ownership of these issues by students in the 6/7 class is encouraging that this process has brought about sustainability post my placement. Their future plans for activities and strategies to
build a positive and caring culture during lunch breaks show the tangible outcomes.

6. References:

My translation.


Online visited 03.10.07. Developed by clinical staff - division of Mental Health.