Chapter 14
Prepare2Nspire:
A Community-Engaged Social Justice Mathematics Project

Lesa M. Covington Clarkson
University of Minnesota, USA

Jessica V. Forrester
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9806-5384
University of Virginia, USA

Elena A. Contreras Gullickson
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8005-8293
University of St. Thomas, USA

ABSTRACT

Community engagement and social justice are unique and well-defined frameworks of working with, about, and for communities. These approaches to teaching and learning have a number of potential benefits; however, they also come with their own challenges and misunderstandings. This chapter will explore this by first defining what is meant by community engagement and social justice, followed by providing some mathematics education context and history. Next, a narrative structure of P2N will be shared, primarily as it resides in the understanding of social justice. Finally, the intersection of these two theories will be explored and nuanced in general and more specifically in Prepare2Nspire.

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement pedagogy is defined as the combination of "learning goals and community service in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good" (Bandy, 2016). Social justice work, on the other hand, according to Feagin (2001), "...requires resource, equity, fairness, and respect for diversity as well as the eradication of existing forms of social oppression" (p. 32). This chapter seeks to explore the intersectionality and understanding of social justice and community engagement

through the lens of a research project, Prepare2Nspire (P2N). This mathematics mentoring and tutoring program is an example of what Larnell, Bullock, & Jett (2016) describe as providing access to higher mathematics study and "empowering students to alter or improve the present social order" (Gholson et al., 2017, p. 156). P2N lives in the intersection of community engagement and social justice, and implicit in its programming is empowerment and transformation. This chapter will explore this by first defining what is meant by community engagement and social justice followed by providing some mathematics education context and history. Next, a narrative structure of P2N will be shared primarily as it resides in the understanding of social justice. Finally, the intersection of these two theories will be explored and nuanced in general and more specifically in Prepare2Nspire.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Community Engagement

The process of community engagement centers "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Fitzgerald et al., 2012, p. 12). When done with an asset-based lens, community engagement can frame families and communities as influential participants in decision-making and resources for systemic change (Ishimaru, 2014). According to Noel (2011), there are three important steps for authentic community engagement: 1) becoming integrated into the community in order to develop trust, 2) conducting studies to learn about communities' practices and histories, and 3) becoming involved in community engagement activities. In other words, in order to create transformative partnerships with communities, professionals must focus on first building relationships and valuing communal practices before initiating any research or action plan. Time is an additional factor to consider with community-engaged practice and research because of the service involved with "building and maintaining relationships with the community, fostering reflexive learning, and trying to focus on the process of understanding the root causes of a problem" (Tarantino, 2017, p. 105). Researchers, educators, and students motivated by authentic collaborations should understand the time needed to develop successful partnerships for mutual transformation.

Equally as important to the engagement process, researchers and practitioners must also define the intended community for the collaborative project. Community is an umbrella term applied in a number of ways, including geographic communities, virtual communities, communities of circumstance, and communities of interest (Fraser, 2005). In this chapter, we demonstrate how geographical communities and communities of interest intertwine in a mathematics tutoring/mentoring program. And lastly, it is important to consider the ethical and professional norms of community engagement approaches before research or education initiatives are put into place. Any initiative must benefit the community and keep the needs of those involved at the forefront. There are deep histories of distrust between underserved communities and universities, so maintaining notions of care, trust, emotional investments, and morality is of utmost importance (Campano et al., 2015). It is important for community engaged research to be based on authentic relationships developed by researchers being *in* the community before research is initiated.

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