

# Chapter 1

## An Architecture of Participation: Working with Web 2.0 and High School Student Researchers to Improve a Service-Learning Partnership

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### ABSTRACT

*This case study, collaboratively authored by a university researcher and five high school students, presents a model for assessing community partnerships that employs Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate participatory evaluations. A research team of high school students undertook an evaluation of a service-learning partnership titled Wildcat Writers that sponsors online writing exchanges between high school and college English courses. The evaluation project used a participatory action research (PAR) approach, which involves (1) including community members as equal co-researchers, (2) respecting experiential knowledge, and (3) working toward mutually-conceived positive change. This case study demonstrates how Web 2.0 tools that allow participants to collaboratively create documents provide an architecture of participation that supports a PAR approach to assessing and improving community partnerships.*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Who you are changes what you see.” This observation by high school student researcher Aria Altuna holds important implications for the assessment of service-learning (SL) programs. All forms of inquiry are shaped by the perspective and background of the inquirer, as science theorist Haraway (1998) has reminded us. In service-learning assessments, the evaluator’s worldview influences the choice of the outcomes to examine, the collection methods, and the approach to interpreting data. We cannot pretend that factors such as college or community affiliation have no impact on our assessments. Yet as service-learning scholars Cruz and Giles (2000) have noted, community-university partnership evaluations are traditionally carried out solely by university representatives. Cruz and Giles have explained that when university members conduct evaluations, academic issues such as student learning, faculty performance reviews, and institutional goals take center stage, while the perspective of the community remains relatively untapped. The focus becomes “Where’s the learning in service-learning?” rather than also “Where’s the service in service-learning?” (Cruz & Giles, p. 28). Because assessments often form the basis for program planning, the university’s needs and ways of understanding the world therefore steer the partnership—an imbalance we find deeply problematic.<sup>1</sup>

To resist this hierarchy in university and community relationships, and to develop partnerships responsive to community needs and perspectives, we suggest actively involving community members in the design and implementation of program evaluations. This participatory process can be supported by Web 2.0 technologies—tools that go beyond technical facilitation to foster the participatory approach to knowledge needed for collaborative meaning-making. As software designer and IT entrepreneur Kapor (2006) has famously observed, “Architecture is politics.” Changing the power dynamics of the university-

community relationship requires finding tools that are structured to promote democratic ways of thinking and interacting. We argue that Web 2.0 technologies have the potential to encourage more balanced program assessments.

This chapter traces the efforts of a research team of five high school students (Aria, Timothy, Oksana, Savannah, and Jalina) and one graduate student researcher (Rachael) to collaboratively evaluate a service-learning partnership between the University of Arizona and five local high schools. The service-learning partnership, Wildcat Writers, pairs high school and college English classes for online writing exchanges. As representatives of the community being “served” by the partnership, the high school student researchers provided invaluable leadership and insight in the project, and the graduate student (who is also the coordinator of Wildcat Writers) offered guidance in research methods and access to teachers and administrators. Together, we crafted research questions, designed evaluation tools, collected and analyzed data, and presented our findings to key stakeholders in our program. Together, we also composed this book chapter to detail our project for others who may be interested in our approach. Our composition process follows our participatory philosophy, as this chapter was authored collaboratively on a Web 2.0 tool called Google Wave. We all brainstormed for each section of the piece, and then certain groups took on primary authorship for each part of the chapter. The student researchers crafted the section on Wildcat Writers and the student research team, along with portions of the conclusion, and Rachael wrote the other sections, incorporating quotations from the student researchers. Our case study intentionally uses a “we voice,” because although this approach may gloss over the differences that naturally arise on a diverse team (Cahill, Rios-Moore, & Threatts, 2008, p. 93), we are committed to the participatory feel and enriched perspective that a “we voice” gives our description of the project.<sup>2</sup> We first provide background on Wildcat Writers

and outline the process we undertook as a research team. We then describe the need for a participatory action research (PAR) approach to evaluation, and we demonstrate how Web 2.0 tools can be integrated with PAR approaches to knowledge through examples from our own work. Finally, we address the limitations of 2.0 technologies and participatory evaluations, and conclude by highlighting key outcomes of our project, along with future possibilities for the field of service-learning.

## WILDCAT WRITERS AND THE STUDENT RESEARCH TEAM

Wildcat Writers is a program that connects high school and college students online to exchange pieces of writing. One goal of the program is to help teachers better understand and bridge the gap between high school and college writing, so that high school students will be better prepared for college composition. The program also strives to motivate students to be interested in writing, and to connect the university with the community; Wildcat Writers wants to help high school students feel more comfortable about the idea of college and encourage university students to become more involved with the larger community. The partnership began in 2004 with a single collaboration between a graduate student and a high school teacher, and eventually expanded to be an official part of the University of Arizona’s Writing Program.<sup>3</sup> Currently upwards of a thousand students and twenty-eight teachers are involved each year. The program incorporates service-learning scholar Deans’ (2000) model of community writing, which includes three forms of writing exchange: writing for, where students write for their partners; writing about, where students write about their experiences of interacting with their partners; and writing with, where students work collaboratively with their partners to produce a single piece of writing. Sample projects include

photo essays, letters about college life, public arguments, reflection journals, and zines. To connect students we use technologies such as e-mail, blogs, Nings, VoiceThread, Glogster, Edmodo and GeoGraffiti.<sup>4</sup> Whereas college students may often be perceived only as role models to high school students, Wildcat Writers allows both parties to benefit one another, creating a more equal partnership. The program has expanded greatly, but before this year there was not yet any official research to determine the effects of the program.

The Wildcat Writers student research team was established with the purpose of evaluating and improving the Wildcat Writers program. We, the five high school sophomores on the team, were recruited by Rachael for our exceptional writing skills and desire to be involved in the community. We met with Rachael before and after school in the computer lab, using our ingenuity, creativity and the help of pizza-flavored goldfish to develop, evaluate, and implement different research methods to improve Wildcat Writers. Our group also used this time to train ourselves and acquire certification with the University of Arizona IRB (Institutional Review Board). We had various collaborations with the university where we interviewed professors such as the director of the writing program, participated in graduate classes where we presented our use of PAR and 2.0 technology, and used university resources such as the library.

The process of constructing our research project began with a logic model, a tool applied in professional evaluations to better understand the inputs, activities, and outputs of a given program.<sup>5</sup> This allowed us to identify the possible strengths and weaknesses of Wildcat Writers. Using the logic model, we produced potential research questions and voted to choose the best: (1) Are the high school students enjoying the partnership? Why or why not? (2) Has the partnership made the high school students more interested in attending college? (3) Are the high school students becoming more interested in writing? and (4) Has the

partnership helped the high school students better understand and appreciate college writing? These questions served as a base for crafting further questions for the surveys and later for directing our focus groups.

As a research team, we placed high importance on having students themselves conduct the research and delve into the subject at hand. As high school students, we are better able to gain insight and understanding of the situation as pertains to the Wildcat Writers participants, as opposed to a possibly intimidating professor. Our initial contact with the students began with the surveys, through which we sought to discern the effects the participants experienced as a result of Wildcat Writers. When presenting the surveys in classrooms, we were the ones to enter the room and explain the purpose and necessity of the survey and consent forms. We used the guidelines expressed throughout the IRB certification to explain the specifics of the survey. Between the pre- and post-surveys, we conducted focus groups. Each group consisted of about five students and was led by one member of the research team. Through half-hour sessions we were able to gain honest opinions and feedback.

Upon receiving the results of both pre- and post-surveys and student responses shared through focus groups, we analyzed and coded the data. Using this data we formed our recommendations for Wildcat Writers. Our suggestions included changing the way the program is introduced to both high school and college participants, moving the campus visit for high school students to the beginning rather than end of the semester, and tying Wildcat Writers assignments to the course grade for accountability, among other changes. After we finalized our recommendations, we presented this data to participating teachers, community partners, administrators, and eventually at a conference at the university.

## TOWARD A NEW APPROACH: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

We believe our model, though not universally applicable, has the potential to move beyond many of the problems of traditional service-learning assessments. Evaluations of community-university partnerships have historically focused on college student impact. A wide variety of survey scales and strategies have been developed to address the question of student learning (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2003; Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, & Nguyen, 2006). Cruz and Giles (2000) have suggested that this focus on students rather than community is largely due to political reasons, because the fledgling field of service-learning has struggled to prove its validity as a pedagogical approach in order to justify institutional support (p. 28). Therefore, when community impact is included in assessments, it is usually only one variable among many others (Cruz & Giles, p. 29). Common approaches to gauging community attitudes toward service-learning include questionnaires mailed out to site staff, interviews of organization leaders, and evaluations of student work by nonprofit supervisors (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Ferman & Hill, 2004; Oates & Leavitt, 2003). In other words, when community members are involved in evaluations, they remain mostly on the sidelines as a secondary data source.

Some innovative work has moved beyond this university-centered model. For example, a group of scholars originating from Portland State University (Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Gelmon, 2000; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Holland, 2001) has crafted a detailed chart of assessment questions and objectives for *each* major stakeholder group in service-learning: students, faculty, institutions, and community partners. Another step forward is the publication of *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning* (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), a book devoted solely to community

perspectives in partnerships. The book explores key themes that arose from a series of interviews with nonprofit staff who have participated in service-learning projects.

However, even though progress in honoring community perspectives has been made, studies that incorporate community voices often suffer from a problem *defining* "community." The people receiving the services of nonprofits are often melded with the staff—service-learning scholarship seems to assume that the staff perspective is a sufficient representation of the community. Yet the vast majority of nonprofit staff is white and middle class, and most clients do not share this background (Toupin & Plews, 2007, p. 7). Given our interest in how position changes perception, we are concerned that the views of community members themselves are not being heard in service-learning assessments. As Martin, SeBlonka and Tryon (2009) noted in *Unheard Voices*, "As far as we know, there are no studies of client experiences with short term service-learning" (p. 62). These community perspectives are certainly not incorporated regularly into assessment design, and thus we are left with an impoverished view of our programs. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) have explained that not knowing the effects of service-learning means that we risk doing more harm than good, burning bridges, and "ultimately undermin[ing] the entire effort of service-learning" (7).

Scholars in service-learning are beginning to call attention to the lack of community input on assessment and the need for change (Bowdon, 2008; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Driscoll et al., 1996; Ferman & Hill, 2004; Gelmon, 2000). Bowdon has argued that in order to create sustainable and meaningful partnerships, we must work with community members to research our impact. We feel one particular method of community-based inquiry provides an especially generative framework for service-learning assessment: participatory action research (PAR). Brabeck (2004) defined PAR as "an enterprise that engages researchers and com-

munity members as equal participants; combines popular, experiential knowledge with that of an academic, 'rational' perspective; and seeks to join community members in collective action aimed at radically transforming society" (p. 43). PAR has evolved both from theorists in the Majority World who view PAR as a liberatory approach to inquiry (Fals-Borda, 2001; Freire, 2000) and from Western scholars from the fields of social psychology, management, and organization theory who have pursued PAR as a more effective model of improving organizations (Lewin, 1948; Senge & Scharmer, 2001). Today PAR is a thriving approach to research employed across disciplines and communities. A sister field to PAR, Participatory Evaluation (PE), may also prove helpful to service-learning assessment, as it offers a model of evaluating programs with the help of those impacted by the programs.<sup>6</sup>

Many scholars have written on assigning participatory projects to service-learning students (Kinney & Boddie, 2001; Reardon, 1998), but we join the growing scholarship that addresses the possibilities of using PAR and PE to research the service-learning program itself (Giles & Cruz, 2000; Marullo et al., 2003; Payne, 2000). We see PAR as a generative framework for assessing community-university partnerships, because as student researcher Oksana notes, "PAR involves the people being affected." This collaboration fosters more accurate evaluations: Student researcher Savannah argues that involving high school students in our project provided "a true insider's view" in creating assessment methods, and incorporating both community and university representatives on the team created a "full, spherical perspective" on the program. The students were able to contribute substantially to the process because PAR emphasizes experiential rather than "objective" knowledge, creating space for personal stories and feelings to be treated as data. As student researcher Jalina writes, "PAR is a way of doing research without feeling disconnected." Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, PAR's

focus on producing transformative action kept us keenly aware of our goal to improve a program that directly affects students at five Tucson high schools, which serve a very high proportion of low-income, Latino/a, and Native American students—all groups severely underrepresented in higher education.

As our research team attempted to implement a PAR approach, we ran into the challenge of developing concrete methods for putting participatory theory into practice. In particular, we needed a way of working with documents collaboratively, because we would be crafting research tools, entering and analyzing data, and writing presentations together. As the IText group of digital writing scholars has argued, the process by which texts are created shapes organizations almost as much as the texts themselves (Geisler et al., 2001, p. 280). We knew we needed more than one set of hands on the keyboard. This led us to explore the possibilities of Web 2.0.

### SIX CURSERS, ONE SCREEN: WEB 2.0 AS SYNERGIST FOR PARTICIPATORY INQUIRY

Student researcher Oksana aptly explains why we used Web 2.0 technologies during our research: “PAR and Web 2.0 are soul-mates!” Web 2.0 provides a structure especially fit for PAR assessments of community partnerships. The term “Web 2.0,” coined by Tim O’Reilly and Dale Dougherty, does not have a cut and dry definition, but is rather a “gravitational core” of concepts; it is “more an attitude than a technology” (O’Reilly, 2005, *The Web as platform*, para. 1). As Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) have explained, “The essential difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that content creators were few in Web 1.0, with the vast majority of users simply acting as consumers of content, while *any* participant can be a content creator in Web 2.0” (Introduction, para. 4). This means that in contrast to Web 1.0 tools, which are

intended for one-way information dissemination, Web 2.0 technologies are characterized by an architecture of participation. Web 1.0 technologies include Encyclopedia Britannica, Mapquest, and websites without comment features, while tools such as Wikipedia, Google Maps, and Facebook move closer to the ideal of Web 2.0.

For our research project, we chose a 2.0 technology called Google Wave that allows users to build texts in community through collaborative, real-time editing. We utilized this tool to draft a variety of documents, such as our team contract, interview and focus group questions, surveys, presentations, and this chapter. Wave also provided a virtual space for discussing ideas, dividing and tracking tasks, communicating over school breaks, and planning meetings. While Google announced that it was discontinuing development on Wave a few months after we completed our project, Wave is only one among a range of Web 2.0 collaborative composition tools that can be used to foster participatory evaluations. Similar tools available at the time of this writing include wikis, Google Docs, NotePub, Writeboard, and Zoho. Our discussion in this chapter will address both Google Wave in particular, as an example of how a specific technology can be analyzed for affinity with PAR ideals, and Web 2.0 generally.

To deeply understand the implications of working with 2.0 technologies, we need to follow technology critic Feenberg’s (1991) call and move beyond a simple concept of programs as neutral tools controlled by the user. Instead, we use Selber’s (2004) “cultural artifact” metaphor of technology, considering the “political, social, and even psychological assumptions embodied in computers” as well as the contexts in which technologies are used (p. 86). Technology designs and contexts implicitly shape the behaviors and worldviews of users. This active role of digital tools is especially important considering, as Selfe and Selfe (1994) have argued, the way interfaces function as Pratt’s (1991) “linguistic contact zones”: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash,

and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 34). Given the highly political nature of technology, we want to be attentive to the ways that 2.0 tools both promote equality and subtly encourage hierarchy. In many ways, we see 2.0 technologies as a positive force.

To begin, Web 2.0 forwards new ways of conceptualizing knowledge. Dede (2009) has referred to the shift in epistemology between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 as “seismic,” tracing the move from “Classical” notions of knowledge wherein “there is only one correct, unambiguous interpretation of factual interrelationships” discovered by scholars, to a Web 2.0 epistemology, where knowledge is defined as “collective agreement” among ordinary users (p. 80-81). People work together to create content rather than simply reading what has been produced by experts. As education scholar Eijkman (2009) has written, “Web 2.0’s privileging of non-foundational knowledge construction challenges conventional thinking about the nature of knowledge, learning, and academia’s role as the supreme arbiter of ‘true’ and ‘valid’ knowledge” (p. 94). This aligns neatly with PAR’s commitment to valuing community members as experts. Student researcher Tim explains that instead of relying solely on Rachael, the university representative, “We use Google Wave...so we can all build off each others’ knowledge.” For example, we practiced collaborative knowledge generation as we crafted interview questions for the UA writing program director. We began by creating a list of potential questions in a Google Wave document, and then we each read through the list and put emoticons next to the questions we liked. The group copied and pasted questions with more than two emoticons to the top of the document and worked together to delete duplicates, color code the questions based on theme, and arrange them so they progressed smoothly. Google Wave includes a playback feature that

shows the development of drafts over time, and if you were to push the playback button on this document, you would watch six brightly colored cursers jump around the page as the interview questionnaire slowly takes shape. This playback visually represents the philosophies of Web 2.0 and PAR in action.

Web 2.0 tools also have the potential to present new ways of understanding knowledge by extending what counts as data. One method is the 2.0 tendency to “combine facts with other dimensions of human experience, such as opinions, values, and spiritual beliefs” (Dede, 2009, p. 80). In the online world of comments, links, and blogs, these types of knowledge are considered legitimate. Student researcher Tim emphasizes the overlap with PAR: “Just like in PAR, 2.0 accepts experiences and opinions as knowledge and shares the idea that everyone has information to give.” During our process, members of the research team shared stories and personal reflections on our subject, often through informal additions to Google Wave documents. Student researcher Oksana writes, “We’ve used Google Wave to read one another’s ideas and opinions and even stated our opinions about their opinions. That’s a lot of opinions, but that’s what PAR and Web 2.0 are all about.” Many online editing programs, including Google Wave, also make possible the expansion of data by accepting texts authored in multiple languages. This welcoming of non-English texts runs in contrast to the ways that many tools “devalue linguistic diversity and inscribe nonstandard language users as Other within the interface... and the culture” (Selfe & Selfe, 1994, p. 489). For example, though Wave’s interface is only available in English, the spell checker supports multiple languages, and even recognizes and legitimates the practice of switching languages in mid-sentence, a pattern common in many community settings. Forms of knowledge (such as stories and emotions) and languages (such as mixed Spanish and English) that are traditionally excluded from meaning-making can therefore be included.

The interfaces of 2.0 tools are another aspect to consider when trying to support non-dominant modes of thinking, as interfaces shape the way users process and organize information. As Selfe and Selfe (1994) have argued, interfaces often use hierarchical presentations of knowledge, “a perspective characteristically—while not exclusively—associated with patriarchal cultures and rationalistic traditions of meaning making” (p. 492). In contrast, Selfe and Selfe identify associative patterns of knowledge construction as more inclusive. Some 2.0 tools feature highly associative structures. For example, in Google Wave, instead of replying systematically to messages, users can interject at any point in the text to make connections and add remarks. Portions of the document can be easily highlighted and transformed into a new conversation, or linked to another draft through hypertext. Furthermore, Wave employs a collective tagging process that allows any user to label a draft and any draft to hold many tags, encouraging multiple associations with each document.

As Web 2.0 works to equalize knowledge production, it has the potential to create space for more egalitarian connections between people. As in several other 2.0 tools, Google Wave’s edit function allows multiple users to work on the same text without explicitly attributing changes to particular users.<sup>7</sup> This means that while in edit mode, the group treated Rachael’s contributions on Wave with the same scrutiny as text produced by the students, because the authors were unidentified. We were therefore able to remove some of the extra weight attached to ideas offered by the university “authority.”

We also attempted more egalitarian interaction in the process of having the student researchers sign consent forms that presented the expectations, risks, and benefits of participating in the evaluation.<sup>8</sup> Consent documents and contracts usually work against participatory approaches (Blake, 2007; Martin, 2007), because people must sign

a document that outlines the project before having a chance to give input on its design. Instead, Rachael placed the skeleton of the consent form on Google Wave and worked with the students to edit and add material. The document thus became a mutually-designed agreement rather than a contract owned by the researcher. While we used this strategy to compose an IRB consent form, the same method could work for any opening document or contract that details the evaluation process and goals for participants.

From the authoring of the initial consent form to the composition of this case study, our team has consistently worked on 2.0 tools to guide our research process. No one technology offers a perfect solution, however. For example, we were forced to switch from Wave to Google Documents in order to input and organize our survey data, as Wave does not allow collaborative editing of spreadsheets. The lack of spreadsheet functionality was a major drawback of Google Wave, but it was by no means the only one. We turn now to a discussion of the limitations of 2.0 tools and PAR for service-learning assessments.

#### LIMITATIONS OF PAR AND WEB 2.0

If we simply present the potential benefits of participatory technologies, we risk contributing to what Hawisher and Selfe (1991) have described as an irresponsibly positive “rhetoric of technology” (p. 55) that represents digital spaces as sites of idealized democratic exchange. We also perpetuate the incorrect assumption that newer technology always fosters more efficient and effective work (Turnley, 2007, p. 117). If we want to engage participatory methods and technologies responsibly, we must honestly address the ways they can potentially undermine assessment projects. The truth is that during the period we used Wave, it was still a very “buggy” program, and there were days we could have accomplished our work more easily with a pen and paper (Wave “ate”

student researcher Jalina’s initial contribution to this chapter, for example). Using a collaborative editing tool was also not a cure-all for the unequal power dynamics in our group; as Kelly (1993) has noted in her work on student researcher initiatives, “Researchers and teachers can never stop being authorities or having authority” given the societal context that surrounds the research project (p. 21). PAR and 2.0 technologies may help to mitigate the hierarchy, but it can never be completely eliminated. We must also remember that the *use* of the tool determines the power dynamics of the group more than the tool itself. A university evaluator could work with community members on a 2.0 program in a very anti-participatory manner, without allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the project. The Web 2.0 tool cannot do all the work of power sharing.

Given that use plays such a large role in the potential of 2.0 technologies, practitioners must assess the context where the tool will be used when considering limitations. We recognize that while we felt our attempt to use a collaborative editing program for participatory evaluation was generally effective, the success of our project depended fully on our particular context. Our method will not transfer without complication to other situations. Selber (2004) has explained, “As with any form of literacy, computer practices do not travel seamlessly or unproblematically across contexts, cultures, and communities” (p. 22), and the same concept holds true for research methods (Sullivan & Porter, 1997, p. 69). For example, PE requires a significant time commitment from community members, something not everyone is able or willing to contribute (Gelmon et al, 2001, p. 89; Kinnevy & Boddie, 2001, p. 45). Or, evaluators working with data that might be considered personal because of cultural norms or the nature of the nonprofit agency (e.g., a shelter for homeless youth) might have to reconsider moving data online given privacy issues. Furthermore, attempting a participatory assessment on 2.0 technologies necessitates a certain amount

of digital literacy and access on the part of community participants. The student researchers for our project were well prepared because of a grant program at their school that offers high-achieving students free laptops, which are then integrated into classroom instruction. Just down the street, however, another high school in the same district struggles with a severe lack of working computers and digital instruction. Attention to issues of digital access and literacy is especially important for service-learning PE, because the communities where we are negotiating power dynamics are often the same communities negatively impacted by the digital divide. Working on a 2.0 program, however much that program may foster participatory modes of thinking, may actually reinforce unequal power dynamics if the university representative has substantially more experience working online and does not actively find ways to share authority. Community members may end up dependent on the university representative for help navigating the digital landscape, or they may have limited access to computers to do the work. In some contexts, markers and flipchart paper might be a better approach, as everyone has the same level of familiarity with these tools.

No discussion of the limitations of participatory methodologies can be complete without addressing concerns related to the validity of results. Traditional evaluators who craft scales by testing for unidimensionality of scale items, convergent and discriminant validities, and reliability may feel that many participatory evaluations produce “less scientific” results. Of course, it would be possible to go through this kind of highly rigorous process with community members, but many PE practitioners choose to take a more organic approach. We argue that the results are still useful, however. Brunner and Guzman (1989) have also argued for the distinctive value of PE results:

*Participatory evaluation does not produce traditional objective knowledge.... Reality is not described from the point of view of a neutral*

observer. Instead, it is interpreted by passionately involved people who have a stake in the success of the project. The resulting knowledge is not valid because the method with which it was obtained is replicable or because the theoretical constructs, operational definitions, variables, and indicators match. Instead, this knowledge is validated in action, and it has to prove its usefulness by the changes it accomplishes. (p. 16)

We agree, and we ask service-learning scholars to consider judging evaluation methods by the results they produce. In the final section, we discuss some of the outcomes of our project.

### THE LIFEWORLD SPEAKS BACK: OUTCOMES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We see three main outcomes of the work our research team has completed. First, our project demonstrates to the high school administration that the university is truly invested in the Wildcat Writers program, and especially in making sure that the program serves the goals of the high school. As our proposal and approval documentation for this project has passed the desks of various school district officials, and as we present on our project, we have raised the profile of the Wildcat Writers program while showing that the program is committed to the community.

Second, the research project has provided significant educational benefits. Rachael, the graduate student, has learned to practice participatory action research, while the high school students have received support in research methods and writing skills. Student researcher Tim notes, "The greatest improvement I have noticed while participating in this research group is my ability to think critically." Beyond academic skills, participatory projects have the potential to promote empowerment among those who contribute, as outlined by the "Wingspread Declaration of Principles

for Youth Participation in Community Research and Evaluation" (Sabo Flores, 2008, p. 8). Our project has also been educational for university students and faculty in that it presents the high school students as holders of valuable knowledge and skills, challenging stereotypes of high school students, especially stereotypes of youth from the south side of Tucson. As student researcher Aria reflects, "Our project brings equality to the high school and college students."

And finally, we believe we have significantly improved the Wildcat Writers service-learning program. Our evaluation allowed us to suggest changes in the way Wildcat Writers is introduced to participants, as we found they needed a more comprehensive orientation to the program. Additionally, we recommended changes to the partner selection process, such as incorporating student-authored bios, so participants have a greater chance of being paired with someone compatible. We also learned that students should be paired with a partner very early in the semester, because when teachers made the pairings later, the relationships between students were not as strong. A key insight was the need to change the timing of the campus visit to the beginning of the program rather than the end, in order to more thoroughly familiarize the high school students with their partners and build a stronger foundation for the semester. Finally, our team suggested that teachers enhance their practice by providing structures to ensure students respond to their partners in a timely matter.

We find these changes especially meaningful because they stem from the community members themselves. Bland and Atweh (2003), drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action, have written of the potential of student researchers to have input into systems of power. Habermas described a "systems world," comprised of institutions that do not necessarily reflect the values of our "lifeworlds," the daily experiences of people. The systems world has colonized our lifeworld, injecting its principles and metaphors (e.g. productivity, accountability) into the way we

live. Our project, along with other participatory evaluations, holds the potential for the lifeworlds of community members to push back and impact the systems world. The students' thoughts, experiences, and opinions are incorporated into the new administrative system of the service-learning program. We see hope in this model.

Much more research has yet to be done in this area. We second the call in *Unheard Voices* for deeper studies into the community experience of service-learning, especially that of community members themselves. There is also a need for more work on service-learning assessment, the ways technologies can shape assessments, and the potentials of participatory strategies to offer greater community input in university collaborations. The field of service-learning is ripe to move in such directions. We return to Aria's insight in the beginning of this chapter, "Who you are changes what you see," to suggest that as the field changes, our perspectives will also change. Service-learning continues to gain legitimacy and the pressure to prove student outcomes is lessening, which means our research and assessment agendas are primed to open up. The field is ready to see communities and community impact as more central aspects of service-learning, and to look *with* and not simply *at* community members as these questions are asked—perhaps through participatory technologies. We hope that this case study has demonstrated, through both the means of its composition and its content, the potential for community members to contribute considerable insight to this conversation.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Stoecker & Tryon (2009) and Sandy & Holland (2006) for two studies attempting to equalize this imbalance through large-scale investigations of non-profit staff perspective on service-learning.

<sup>2</sup> A “we voice” also provides a more honest representation of the shared labor of our project.

<sup>3</sup> Wildcat Writers is also part of GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness

for Undergraduate Programs), a federal grant project.

<sup>4</sup> Each of these technologies allows for different kinds of interaction. E-mail and blogs facilitate the exchange of and response to basic texts. Nings are networking tools that combine profiles, comment walls, photo-sharing, and discussion boards. VoiceThread allows students to post, annotate, and respond to visual images, while Glogster provides a space for students to create visual arguments. Edmodo uses a Facebook-style interface to allow students to post and reply to material. With GeoGraffiti, students can comment on specific geographic locations, a helpful tool in place-based pedagogies.

<sup>5</sup> See Sabo Flores (2008) for a description of how to utilize logic models in participatory evaluations.

<sup>6</sup> Other fields with rich literatures that inspired our work include transformative participatory evaluation (TPE), youth participatory action research (YPAR), youth participatory evaluation (YPE), and the students as researchers movement (Bland & Atweh, 2004; Brisolara, 1998; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Sabo Flores, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> However, the “reply” function does label text by its author.

<sup>8</sup> The student researchers had to sign IRB consent forms because they would be potentially working on this publication. Usually service-learning practitioners interested in PE need not worry about engaging with the IRB if the project will not be published or presented in an academic forum.