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Creating Value in Community Collaborations: Potential for Student Engagement in Community Food Projects

Brian Sanders
Health and Wellness Promotion
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ameena Batada

Abstract

The number and popularity of projects calling for local food production and food justice is increasing rapidly in Asheville. In many Asheville neighborhoods, several projects build community and increase access to fresh, affordable, and healthy food. On campus at UNC-Asheville many professors and students are also involved in projects and coursework related to local food and food justice, and the demand for service opportunities and coursework is growing quickly. This project explores the benefits and barriers of campus-community collaborations surrounding local food and food justice projects. Using the community engaged participatory model the researcher built relationships and has been actively involved in projects both on campus and in the community. The collaboration allowed the author to develop an interview guide exploring qualitative data related to the needs, struggles, perspectives, and accomplishments of community leaders both on and off campus. The following key results emerged: while there are some barriers to student involvement, there is great potential for community campus collaborations to have benefits to each party. However, a reliable and consistent bridge is essential for valuable educational experiences both on campus and in the community.

1. Background

Universities often attempt to facilitate service learning or civic engagement in the community as part of students' educational experience. However, many barriers prevent students from engaging in meaningful projects. Student involvement is often fleeting while community projects could stretch across decades or longer. There are often logistical barriers such as transportation, and other more complex cultural and institutional barriers. A number of service learning and civic engagement opportunities at UNC-Asheville include involvement in community food projects. While these projects present unique benefits for students and community members they also present challenges.

1.1 Service Learning as Social Change

Institutions of learning must constantly defend their existence and answer to the question: to what end is the education serving? Ernest L. Boyer, a highly touted educator best known for serving as Chancellor of the State University of New York explained the troubling situation with modern educational institutions. "Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculties get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic social, economic, and moral problems". [1] As the cost of education rises and becomes less accessible, institutions must ensure that their work stays in touch with the

needs and climate of civil society. Richard Battistoni, an educator and expert in civic engagement from Providence College describes that "With mounting evidence of disengagement from American politics and public life, especially among young people, there is an ever deepening feeling that our educational institutions are leaving students unprepared for a life of engaged, democratic citizenship". [2] Many universities are responding by making efforts to connect student learning with the civic world through service-learning and community based learning. Battistoni continues "The idea behind these efforts has been to capitalize on the well documented involvement of students in community service to advance the mission of civic engagement".[3] Efforts towards civic engagement rely on equitable campus community relationships that expand student learning.

Service Learning courses seek to engage students in the greater community in order to expand on concepts and experiences in the classroom. Service Learning also seeks to support community based organizations efforts to reach their own goals, and create meaningful and effective partnerships between the University and the Community. David Blouin and Evelyn Perry, scholars from Indiana University South Bend and Rhodes college, explain their motives behind their research study aimed at exploring community members perspectives on service learning. "As service-learning courses become more prevalent, it is increasingly important to ensure that they are mutually beneficial to both universities and communities".[4] However there are challenges in actualizing and maintaining these campus-community relationships and ensuring that they are truly benefiting the community organizations. It is essential to ensure that students are not only learning from their experiences, but that community based organizations are also benefiting. Research on the benefits of service learning for students is plenty, but there is a lack of evidence demonstrating the "impact on community-based organizations".[5] Tammy Lewis of Muhlenberg College poses a crucial question: "are service opportunities providing a laboratory for students, or is student learning and action a vehicle for community empowerment?". [6] She also explains that Service-Learning can take the form of *charity* in which "students serve less privileged individuals and reflect on their experiences in relation to their coursework". [7] The opposing structure is service-learning for *social justice*, which "engages students in academic experiences that attempt to empower communities and create more equitable institutional structures"[8]. This structure aligns with the social theory of Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* who explains "True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity".[9] Community members who are tenured in confronting the issues being addressed in service-learning classes should have their voices heard as to how service learning affects their efforts to transform *their own* communities and what sort of projects would truly assist these efforts.

Food and food education are central focuses of both student initiatives and coursework at UNCA and community organizations in Asheville. Issues of food and agriculture have become increasingly important in recent years as people become more aware of the effects of the industrial food systems on the environment and human health. "Industrial agriculture depends on expensive inputs from off the farm, many of which generate wastes that harm the environment; it uses large quantities of nonrenewable fossil fuels; and it tends toward concentration of production, driving out small producers and undermining rural communities". They continue to describe how "monocultures destroy plant and animal diversity, chemical fertilizers and pesticides harm both the environment and human health, soil is eroding at a much faster rate than can be replenished, and water is consumed at unsustainable rates by the agriculture industry".[10] Additionally the emergence of the term "food desert" has brought issues of food access to the attention of the public, and food insecurity continues to be an issue across the United States. The USDA explains:

> "Food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease".[11]

In Asheville, North Carolina a strong Local Foods movement has emerged, encouraging consumers to choose locally grown food that is less resource intensive to produce and healthier to consume. An article from the Asheville Citizens Times discusses successes in the local food movement in the region: "the data show that Western North Carolina has reversed the trend of loss of farm acreage adding more than 10,000 acres between 2007-2012, even as the rest of the state and country lost farmland."[12] However, there is controversy regarding equitable access to local food in Asheville. Asheville has been described as a "Foodtopia" by the Chamber of Commerce advertising an array of options for fine dining in the city to residents and tourists, farmers markets, and farm to table restaurants[13]. A research study conducted by the Food Research and Action Center paints a different picture of Asheville. Asheville Metropolitan area ranked ninth in the nation in households experiencing food hardship, meaning respondents replied that they did not have money to buy sufficient food for their families.[14] The discrepancy between the advertising campaign of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce and the reality of food access and security demonstrates city officials' acute awareness of

business opportunities catering to tourists and elites, and negligence of the situation around food for ordinary residents of Asheville. Issues of food security have sparked community efforts such as community gardens, mobile markets, and educational programs.

Beyond confronting food security, community gardens and other initiatives around food serve as hands on educational resources for African American communities, confronting the systematic gap explained by the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign:

> "Only 15 percent of black students are in well resourced, high-performing schools, 42 percent are in poorly resourced, low-performing schools…This disparity cannot be disputed, and is validated through the education data collected by state departments themselves. The result of such a gap is equally clear-poor educational opportunities lead to growing achievement inequities and an ever-expanding achievement gap".[15]

The disparity in education equality is just one of many human rights issues in the United States affecting people of color. As the American Civil Liberties Union describes, the constitution guarantees that all children are given "equal educational opportunity no matter what their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex, or whether they are rich or poor, citizen or non-citizen"[16]. The issue of educational equality is one of the most pressing human rights concerns facing the country today.

The issues facing the Asheville community around in food access and education demand immediate attention and action from institutions of higher learning, community organizations, and policymakers. Given the historic challenges of campuses working in and with communities, and the specific situation around food access and education equality in the Asheville area, the purpose of this research study was to explore the benefits, barriers, and other perspectives around the university's efforts to engage students in community-based food projects. The researcher also wished to acknowledge these circumstances in the design of the research, and as such, built upon his own personal experiences working with local communities on food projects.

1.2 Personal Journey

This project began in the late spring of 2014. The previous spring semester of 2013, I left UNC-Asheville on medical leave for mental health reasons and moved in with family in Greensboro, North Carolina. While attending UNC-Greensboro as a part-time student I took a class called "Food and Culture Communications". The class studied food systems, food culture, and local issues of food security and food access. Coursework required 20 hours of work on a community food project. I fulfilled my required hours at the Prince of Peace community garden located in a food desert in East Greensboro. The service opportunity became an essential part of my mental health recovery, and I later returned to UNC-Asheville in the fall. In September of 2014, I began working for Student Environmental Center as an apprentice manager of the ROOTS Community garden at the Rhoades Property and in the following spring, became the principle manager. While working at the garden, the current manager, Ryan Rosemond introduced me to several leaders of community food projects featured in this research paper, including Carl Johnson of Gardens United, Randall Pfleger of Bountiful Cities, and Laurlee Petriz who was then a UNC-Asheville student deeply engaged in work at the Shiloh Community garden.

In the late spring of 2014, I was selected for a Local Food Research Fellowship and began work on the current project. The initial plan was to conduct research exploring how diverse people of the Southern Appalachians relate to the land they live on and the food they eat. Early on in the process, I became engaged in conversations with Lauralee Petriz, who had previously completed the same fellowship and submitted to the UNC-Asheville *Journal of Undergraduate Research*. We discussed the most appropriate research methods to use in African American communities, and barriers of the traditional positivist paradigm. Lauralee Petriz explained her experience to me in the Shiloh Community, which started with her involvement in Strong Roots, a program for youth age K-5th, with a math and science based curriculum that interfaces with gardens. I had led a brief version of the program at Stephen's Lee Recreation Center the previous spring, and began exploring possibilities to conduct research on children's education in gardens. The original research idea was abandoned and the researcher began to develop a new project with the help of Petriz. The goal was to conduct a program similar to Strong Roots at the "Project Lighten Up" summer camp at Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church in the Shiloh Community. The plan was to collect data on methods of teaching math and science to children through gardening. However, due to logistical barriers and

apprehension from the Pastor Spencer Hardaway of Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church we failed to implement the program and my project was once again abandoned.

I began consulting previous undergraduate research work done in the Shiloh Community in order to find a research model and paradigm that could break down the barriers that had been faced. A paper written by a previous student named Kevin Rumley, who had worked extensively on his research with Petriz, was discovered and became an essential resource for developing research methods that were appropriate for the communities I was engaged in. The paper was called "Shifting the Research Paradigm: Exploring Community-Based Participatory Research and the Implications of Traditional Research Methods on African-American Populations", and discusses the many barriers of using the traditional positivist research paradigm in African-American communities. It also demonstrates the strengths of the community engaged participatory method as a paradigm with the potential to bridge the cultural gaps that might exist when working in communities. Deeply inspired by the following excerpt from Rumley's paper, the researcher entered a period of self-reflection:

> …I decided to re-assess my own intentions, goals, methods and expectations. I shifted my perspective and placed myself under the microscope of investigation. Stepping into the role of a community member, and observing myself from the outside. What would my perceptions of *self* be? What parts of my persona are most important? What are my weaknesses? How does my position as a white, college-age male carry certain presuppositions for the observer? The process of self-reflection gave insights into new perspectives of reality that I somehow had previously neglected. What does it mean to be a student researcher coming into a community rife with a history of discrimination and exploitation? In the end, I decided that it was more important to *experience* community at the risk of never even doing research. I decided to dedicate all of my efforts to find ways of serving and becoming involved. This new direction released me from the structural confines inherent in traditional positivist observation. This marked the beginning of my journey of self-reflection and growth. The…idea was abandoned, and I opted instead for a process/method that required continued periods of self-reflection and inquiry.[17]

I revaluated a traditional positivist based paradigm in which research is conducted *on* rather than *with* the community, and shifted to the community based participatory model used by Rumley. In community based participatory research, "partners contribute "unique strengths and shared responsibilities" to enhance understanding of a given phenomenon and the social and cultural dynamics of the community"[18]. By shifting the research paradigm and becoming engaged in the community through service and participation in the Shiloh Community garden the community's perception of me changed for the better. With the new paradigm, the original goals of investigating oral histories and evaluating methods of teaching math, science, and gardening were reached in an informal setting. However, the necessity of Institutional Review Board approval and the extensive consent forms required, especially for research on children, made it impossible to conduct traditional academic research in this setting. While the Shiloh community garden is an open environment welcome to all people who desire to *experience* the community garden, attempts to *extract*, *record*, and *objectify* these experiences for formal academic research were considered by the researcher to be unwelcome and incongruent with the atmosphere and culture of the community. I had not moved any closer to performing academic research, but I enjoyed the many benefits of community involvement, which will be explored in depth in the results section.

At the beginning of the Fall 2014 semester at UNC-Asheville I was asked by UNC-Asheville professor Jessica Pisano to help coordinate the hours of service-learning of students from a Language 120 class through my position as the ROOTS community garden coordinator. The class represented a large amount of service hours: twenty hours per student for sixty students over the course of a single semester, and the coordinative capacity for campus gardens was limited. I began to think of how to connect the Shiloh community garden, and other community food projects in need of support and volunteer labor, with the resource of service hours from the university. Jessica Pisano was consulted, and expressed interest in facilitating hours for students in off-campus gardens. However, it was quickly determined that there were many barriers to facilitating student involvement off campus. These barriers included some logistical concerns such as transportation, and many more complicated subjective barriers. Both I and Pisano were concerned about facilitating student involvement in a culturally sensitive manner to create a positive experience for both students and community members. It was quickly determined that the issue was extensively complicated, and both parties decided it would be better to delay formal community engagement in this class until these complications were sorted out. Through the process of coordinating service-learning hours of students at the ROOTS garden and serving and learning in other community leader's food projects, I decided to focus my research on an investigation of students, professors, and community leaders who had been involved in campus community collaborations around food.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

This was a cross-sectional interview study with people who had worked in and with community food initiatives. Students, alumni, and community members with extensive involvement in community projects in the Shiloh Community, the Burton Street Community, and the Pisgah View Community were chosen for the sample. Participants were recruited between November 2014 and February 2015. Students or alumni selected and invited to participate in the sample had been involved in projects for at least six months. Four professors were chosen who had taught, or had plans to teach classes with curriculum involving food or nutrition and whose class involved a service learning or community engagement component. Five community leaders of food-related projects were chosen who had had experience working with the university. Two students and one alumnus, counted in the study as a community leader, were chosen based on their long-term engagement in community food projects. Table 1 displays the participants, their affiliation with the University or the community, their title and department if affiliated with UNCA, and the class they were involved in if affiliated with UNCA. Participants were recruited through phone, e-mail, or personal exchange. The "snowball technique" was employed by the researcher in order to find participants who had been engaged in community food projects for an extended period of time. An intentional effort was made to interview community members and students who had worked together on projects in order to collect data that illuminated diverse perspectives of the experience. The goal was to obtain *cultural data* in order to include "people who can offer expert explanations and who represent the intercultural variation that we find in all societies".[19]

Table 1. Interviewees Positions And Affiliations

Name	Affiliation	Title/Department	Class
Amy Lanou	UNCA, Professor	Chair, Health and Wellness	Food Politics and Nutrition Policy
Jessica Pisano	UNCA, Professor	Professor/Literature and Language	Language 120 "Food Matters"
Patrick Bahls	UNCA, Professor	Honors Program Director/Mathematics	Honors Introduction to Service Learning
Lise Kloeppel	UNCA, Professor	Key Center Faculty Director/Drama	N/A
Laurlee Petriz	UNCA, Alumnus	Shiloh Community Garden Coordinator/Health and Wellness	Community Outreach and Health Promotion
Wes Markusfeld	UNCA, Student	Independent Degree Concentration "Sustainability in Social Contexts"	Humanities 478:Cultivating Global Citizenship
Ryan Rosemond	UNCA, Alumnus	Previous ROOTS garden Manager/Environmental Studies: Ecology Concentration	N/A
Randal Pfleger	Bountiful Cities, an Urban Agriculture Non-Profit	Grass to Greens Program Director	N/A
Pastor Spencer Hardaway	Shiloh Community	Pastor Rock Hill Baptist Church, Founder and Director Project Lighten Up	N/A

Norma Baynes	Shiloh Community	President, Shiloh Community Association	N/A
Dewayne Barton	Burton Street Community	Founder, Burton Street Peace Gardens	N/A
Carl Johnson	Pisgah View Community	Farm-hand, Gardens United	N/A

2.2 Interview Guide and Procedures

The researcher developed an interview guide to use with students, community members, and professors to collect qualitative data on their experiences working on collaborative food projects. Interviews were conducted in community meeting locations or on campus at UNC-Asheville and recorded using a voice recorder and by taking notes, and each lasted about half an hour. The interviews were semi-structured, in that the researcher used an interview guide but did not have control over responses. The following interview guides for interviews with participants. Different interview guides were used depending on if the interviewees were for community leaders, students, or professors.

2.2.1community leaders interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself, (who are you where are you from etc.)

2. Please explain your project and its connection to local food and food justice.

3. Please give a brief history of the project.

4. Have UNCA Faculty, Staff, or Students been involved in your project in any way?

5. How has your experience been working with students or Professors from UNCA?

6. Have these students used community resources while working with your project?

7. Have these students used university resources while working with your project?

8. Are you interested in having UNCA students and Faculty become more involved in your project?

9. What benefits do you see in facilitating student or professor involvement?

10. What barriers do you see in facilitating student or professor involvement?

11. Are there any particular University resources that would be of benefit to your project?

12. What do you think the Universities role is in the Ashville community?

2.2.2 student participant interview questions

1. Please Identify and tell a bit about yourself (where from, major, year)

2. Please identify the community local food project you have worked with and give a description of your involvement.

3. Is there a food justice component to the community project you worked on?

4. Was your involvement in this project a part of a UNCA class or affiliated research project or Class? If so please explain the connection.

5. Were any community resources used while working with the community local food project?

6. Were any university resources used while working with the community local food project?

7. How do you feel that the university could improve its support of community local food projects in order to support the project and facilitate student involvement?

8. What benefits did you receive from the project?

9. What barriers did you face while working on the project?

10. What do you think the University's role is in the Asheville community?

2.2.3 interview questions for professors of food related or civic engagement service learning classes

1. What is the goal of your service learning class? How is it related to issues of local food?

2. How is it related to food justice?

3. Please explain the layout of the class, and what sort of projects or service hours students are required to complete.

4. Please list benefits you see coming from your involvement in Community Food initiatives.

5. What benefits have not been realized that you would like to see.

What are some of the barriers you face in getting students involved in community initiatives?

2.3 Analysis

The researcher used post-hoc analysis to review the interviews after they were conducted to examine patterns and themes from participant responses. Grounded theory was used to identify key concepts that came from participant responses and group them into thematic categories. Narrative analysis was also used to examine and interpret the stories and experiences participants shared in their interviews.

2.4 Service and Gardening as a Method

The practice of personal involvement in both engaging in community food projects and coordinating other students' engagement in projects was a crucial tactic in the Community Engaged Participatory methods used by the researcher

> "A participative worldview, with its notion of reality as both subjective and objective, involves an extended epistemology: we draw on diverse forms of knowing as we encounter and act in our world. Experiential knowing is through direct face-to face encounters with a person, place, or thing…that kind of in-depth knowing that is almost impossible to put into words".[20]

While much of the researcher's findings are based on analysis of interviews with subjects, the experience of engaging in communities and coordinating other students' engagement was an extremely valuable participatory method.

The most effective method of community engagement was to ask a community leader what needed to be done, or better yet, if they had anything they wanted me to figure out how to do. This built trust and rapport with community members while giving the researcher first-person experience of engaging in a community food project. Although various tasks were completed including food preparation and other general assistance, gardening was the task most often performed as a method. The researcher applied principles and techniques he had learned at the ROOTS garden to offer support to garden projects in physical labor, planning, and eco-agricultural consultation, such as soil building. Using gardening as a method, he was able to engage an array of plant and soil organisms in the research process, and demonstrate the potential benefits for varied relationships that could be made in community projects. This process demonstrates adoption of a participatory worldview:

> "Relationships do not exist only with other humans; we also have relationships with the more-than-human world. As we become increasingly aware that the damage being done to the planet's ecosystems and the resultant sustainability crisis are in part the result of our failure to understand the systematic nature of the

planet's ecosystems and humanity's role in the course of natural processes, we can also see that participation is an ecological imperative" [21]

3. Results

3.1 Goals of Community Projects and Potential Benefits

Goals discussed by participants were focused on community building, education, and health. While several of the projects are community gardens, Carl Johnson of the Pisgah View Garden was the only participant that directly stated that the primary goal of the garden was to produce food for the community. Responses from leaders from the Shiloh Community Garden and the Burton Street Community Garden focused on the value of the gardens as places for healthy community gatherings and education. The potential benefits of collaborating with the University involve advancing the goals of community members around education, health, and community building. Table 2 lists direct quotes from participant discussion of goals.

Table 2. Goals Of Community Projects

Participant	Community Project	Discussion of Goals
Pastor Spencer Hardaway	Project Lighten Up	"designed to shorten the achievement gap among African American students"
Norma Baynes	Shiloh Community Garden	"place of education and physical health" where the ""community could come together for food and social events"
Dewayne Barton	Burton Street Peace Gardens	" to turn the neighborhood into a community school and to teach people how to build a strong and connected community"
Carl Johnson	Pisgah View Community, Gardens United	"to sustain the community with access to local food and to create employment"

3.2 Benefits for Students and Professors

Professors' responses regarding the benefits of student involvement in community food initiatives demonstrated that professors saw that the involvement helped to spark interest in further involvement and encouraged community building both on and off campus. Amy Lanou said that for some of her students, their involvement has been "an enlightening experience that sparks an interest in them in understanding where food comes from or wanting to have a garden of their own or wanting to participate in community gardens later". Jessica Pisano said that "Students are thinking about things they haven't thought about before, especially since these students are freshman…I also really like the fact that it gets them involved in service and involved on the UNCA campus so early in the career, I saw some community starting to happen through their working in gardens…I think that was one of the benefits students were listing on the surveys I sent out last semester…It takes students off campus too, students that are new to Asheville and they're trying to figure out what Asheville is about, and how they can fit into that".

Two students responded that they considered their involvement in community food projects to be essential to the academic experience and personally impactful and transformative. Wes Markusfeld said "It's essential that students experience what they're learning outside the classroom and interact with people who aren't only their peers". Ryan Rosemond explains the personal importance of his experience in the Shiloh Community Garden. "[the garden] had an overwhelming impact on me, and I lived for those Saturdays for a long time whether or not I was coming in hungover or maybe I had to not do the shit on a Friday night that other people were doing, but I still had those Saturdays to kick it with Frieda and some younger kids".

Three participants noted that students reap material benefits from working in community gardens. They noted that communities share their tools, land, and often free meals with students who are involved in projects. One participant, Lauralee Petriz, placed specific emphasis on the value of students learning from the histories and stories shared by community members.

3.3 Community Serving UNC-Asheville

Three participants discussed a community food project where the community served the University by assisting in the development of a community garden on campus. Ryan Rosemond discussed benefits of having community members assist him in both a swale and hoop house project at the Rhoades Property on campus, and called special attention to the work of Randall Pfleger of Bountiful Cities. "It was really difficult to get that project finished period and Randall was *huge* from the moment we were picking through the frame to when the plastic was getting wrapped on it". Randall Pfleger and Amy Lanou both discussed the extensive work of Bountiful Cities in the planning and project development phase of the ROOTS garden at the Rhoades Property. Randall said the "biggest impact the garden has had is certainly with UNCA students". The ROOTS garden represents a unique project in which community engagement roles were reversed: community agents, particularly Bountiful Cites, did extensive work to support an on campus community project.

3.4 Logistical Barriers

The most commonly reported barrier cited by participants was geographic isolation and transportation. Six of the twelve participants stated that transportation was a barrier to student involvement in community food initiatives. However, one participant, Lauralee Petriz, noted that this barrier might actually have the positive effect "sifting through" the students who really care about being involved in the community. She said "sometimes having to figure it out is really a good thing".

3.5 Continuity Barriers

Several interviewees expressed the importance and challenges of continuity in facilitating fleeting student involvement in projects that are ongoing in the community. Two respondents specifically cited the issue of students making promises and developing project ideas that were unrealistic to complete. Figure 1 shows a Shiloh Community "Garden Day" in the snow, demonstrating the importance of year round community involvement. Table 3 shows quotes of interviewees discussing issues of continuity.

Figure 1. Snowy day at the Shiloh Community Garden

Table 3. Participant Responses Regarding Continuity

Ryan Rosemond	"Knowing that there was a time I might leave, it had an impact on me realizing that. I tried not to let it affect my interactions but at times I totally felt like a farce. It's like yeah I'm out here for the here and now, but there's no guarantees and there's no overarching commitment…You can't be contingent on a 22 year old for a long term thing, but the university is. I realized, that's a positive thing if I really can tie the university in with these community members". "I realized you gotta go out there and make the commitment to people and not just have ideas that happen all too much."
Randal Pfleger	"One of the real challenges of community engagement and long term work is that it needs to happen year round".
Wes Markusfeld	"A lot of people make promises and then it doesn't work out, and that was part of why Betsalel is hesitant to continue the class". "It's not solely good intentions, its positive outcomes."
Lise Kloeppel	"It's important for students to understand how community projects happen, and they they're ongoing. In one semester what is actually possible?" "Students come in with grandiose ideas, and might meet someone whose been working on the project for 30 years".

3.6 Cultural and Institutional Gaps and the Role of the Bridge

Five interviewees expressed that a cultural and institutional gap exists between the communities and the university or outside organizations in general. Some of these respondents emphasized the need for more coordination and commitment from the university to bridge this gap. However, two respondents from the Shiloh community noted that the work of alumni Lauralee Petriz has been essential in maintaining the connection to the university. Marksufeld cited Dewayne Barton as an essential resource in bridging his coursework from the University with civic engagement in the Burton Street Community. Table 4 offers interviewee's insights on the gaps between the University and the community and the importance of strong bridges in confronting this issue.

Table 4. interviewee responses on gap between community and university

Ryan Rosemond	"I think by the time communities are approached there's this whole academic structure as to what they want students to experience, and it has little to do with the community and their needs. They're all assumed at that point". "The university really does not know what's good for communities of need. How can they as a body understand what's happening and if they do have any understanding, they sure they don't have any answers. All they have is all they have and no way to get it out". "I saw the university as an overwhelming resource and there wasn't a lot of bridges in the community for support".

Lise Kloeppel	"Sometimes students don't understand what's really going on in the communities, and community members don't understand the institutional structures that are a part of the university".
Wes Markusfeld	"Right now I feel that way it's hard to control and it's hard to be careful and maneuver all these students and make sure it's in a positive manner. Ideally there would be a person who would be involved with these communities that can also be involved with the students in the classes". "Dewayne has been the person to talk to with questions; he would rather not need to help so much because he has his hands in a lot of stuff. Over time we've had conversations and I see where his head's at as a community leader".
Lauralee Petriz	"Outside organizations are not always culturally there…I think there needs to be some more dialogue with outside organizations that doesn't always occur".
Norma Baynes	"The great thing about working with Lauralee is that the connection with the University is still there and still growing".
Pastor Spencer Hardaway	"Lauralee has been very instrumental in providing the connection to UNCA".

3.7 Need for Financial Support

Two interviewees emphasized that the responsibility of educating and facilitating student involvement in the community often falls on community members. They said that the University needs to recognize the effort that community members are putting in with financial compensation.

Dewayne Barton	"If you have a community leader that's taking the time to instruct guide and give information to a student, I think that time should be valued". When asked "If the University valued community engagement projects in Burton Street would they offer more financial support and continuity?" he responded, "Yes".
Lise Kloppel	"Community members are putting in work and not necessarily getting paid for it. Community members are acting as co-educators, and there needs to be some sort of compensation".

4. Discussion

4.1 Food Justice

Participant responses concerning the goals of community projects and the role of their projects or classes in relation to local food and food justice varied significantly. This is in part due to general lack of clarity as to what each term means and the different connotations associated with each. According to the USDA, "there is no consensus definition of "local" or "local food systems" in terms of geographic distance between production and consumption"[22]. Food Justice is a term made prominent by authors Robert Gottlieb and Henry Luce in their book *Food Justice.* The book explores the many issues with today's food system including poor farmworker conditions, and lack of food access and wholesomeness. "A food justice framework ensures the benefits and risks of how food is grown and processed, transported, distributed, and consumed are shared equitably."[23] Respondents may not have explicitly stated that their projects were involved in local food or food justice, even if they addressed these issues.

Amy Lanou said that by teaching a course on food justice she was trying "to get students to understand food insecurity and the root causes of it, and more and less just solutions to food insecurity. It's not a simple problem." Patrick Bahls said he was exposed to food justice through the book with the same title, and considered it part of his motivation for sending his students to do service hours related to food in the community. Lise Kloeppel, a faculty director for UNC-Asheville's key center, the department tasked with coordinating student service, said she was interested in assessing UNC-Asheville's institutional commitment with food and wellbeing in the community. These

responses demonstrate that interest in university community collaboration on projects related to food justice exists in a variety of departments on campus.

4.2 Pisgah View Garden Confronting Food Access and Food Security

Carl Johnson, one of two farmhands of the Pisgah View Gardens emphasized the role of the garden in providing food for the community. Pisgah View Apartments are a public housing facility located in a "food desert", defined as "urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food…The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to high levels of obesity, and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease"[24]. Johnson said that while one of the goals of the garden business is to provide employment opportunities to residents, the main goal is to "sustain the community with access to local food". In an interview with Modern Farmer magazine, Johnson stated that "The garden means a whole lot, because it's life itself and its feeding us better than we have been eating in a long time"[25]. Food security is a major issue in Western North Carolina. "One in every six people in Western North Carolina experiences food insecurity".[26] Additionally, there has been a 27 percent increase in Buncombe County residents that receive food assistance. [27] Based on these responses, it is clear that one of the primary goals and successes of the Pisgah View Gardens project is confronting food access in face of the food desert where the apartments are located.

4.3 Garden Projects Go Beyond Food Production

While food production may be the assumed benefit of student involvement in community food projects, projects often use food and gardening as a resource for education. Cooking demonstrations are held at the Shiloh Community Garden every Saturday, usually performed by a resident who is a professional chef. Pastor Hardaway brought his students to the UNCA kitchen to learn how to cook and prepare food, which he said was "a great educational experience" for them.

Respondents emphasized the role of community gardens as an educational resource especially for youth. While each community described in this paper is extremely unique, Shiloh, Burton Street and Pisgah View are all predominantly African-American communities. Much research has been done to demonstrate that there is a systematic gap in achievement among African American students.

> "Only 15 percent of Black students are in well resourced, high-performing schools, 42 percent are in poorly resourced, low-performing schools…This disparity cannot be disputed, and is validated through the education data collected by state departments themselves. The result of such a gap is equally clear-poor educational opportunities lead to growing achievement inequities and an ever-expanding achievement gap"[28]

Pastor Hardaway explicitly stated that the purpose of the Project Lighten Up summer camp was "to shorten the achievement gap among African-American students". The camp offers scholarships and hosts students from several Asheville communities, and "blend(s) education and recreation to prevent the large amount of summer learning loss between school years". As a part of Project Lighten up, campers went to Hickory Nut Gap Farms and toured campus gardens at UNCA. Pastor Hardaway said that these were valuable experiences for his students, and that it was a "great experience to get to college and just to be on campus".

While the Shiloh Community Garden produces healthy food for community residents, education, rather than food production is the primary goal of the project. Children are engaged with UNC-Asheville students and community members in food preparation, gardening, construction, and art projects. Lauralee Petriz discussed how the communal nature of the Shiloh garden supported healthy eating habits. She said "I certainly at the garden have had good food, and if you bring anything to the garden you got to share it, so that really limits what kids bring to the garden that's unhealthy".

Wes Markusfeld, a student who completed coursework at the Burton Street Garden said that community leader Dewayne Barton said to "make the garden like a classroom". Barton discussed that one of the principle goals of the project is to link the community with both elementary and university educational systems. Markusfeld observed youth involvement at the Shiloh Community garden, and said that their involvement made it "a true community garden". In response to lack of community involvement in the garden, Markusfeld started an afterschool program at the Burton Street Recreation Center to get more children involved in the project. Figure 2 shows a raised bed that was painted by students in the afterschool program, members of the community, and UNC-Asheville students.

Figure 2. Art created in Burton Street afterschool program

In discussing elements of food justice, Markusfeld said initially, addressing food security and access was one of his goals. While he said there are many plots in the community where food production could take place, he "realized there are a lot of different types of gardens and reasons to grow food". He continued,

> "in addressing food security I don't think the garden is going to be a great impact. I think the most powerful point of the garden here… is education; teaching kids how to do it and the experience of doing it, and the food that we do grow we're going to be walking around and giving it to elders in the neighborhood"

Markusfeld's comments exemplify the benefits of gardens in creating opportunities for experiential education for children, and creating a sense of ownership in the community. While food production may be the one goal of the project, the experiences of community members in the garden are valuable and beneficial in terms of education and community building.

4.4 Sustainability, Placemaking and Environmentalism

While community gardens produce food and serve as places of education they also play the role of physical spaces where people are empowered to shape their own communities by collaboratively creating shared places. This process exemplifies the practice and philosophy of "placemaking". Placemaking Chicago, a project focused on developing public spaces describes placemaking as "a people centered approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces".[29] Susan Silberberg, a Lecturer in Urban Design at MIT University, explains that placemaking "originating in the 1960's espoused a new way to understand and design public spaces by putting and communities ahead of efficiency and aesthetics".[30] She continues to tell that these "philosophies, considered groundbreaking at the time were in a way reassertions of the people-centered town planning principles that were forgotten during the hundred year period of rapid industrialization, suburbanization, and urban renewal".[31] Ethan Kent, the vice president of the project for public places explains how placemaking creates an alternative to the environmental movement which often focuses solely on discontinuing destructive behaviors rather than embracing creative solutions. "Environmentalism is still largely focused on limiting pollution and changing consumption patterns, which are important goals but ultimately don't go far enough in offering a compelling vision for fundamental change".[32] He continues to explain how the process of placemaking is:

> "dedicated to encouraging and empowering people to take ownership over and contribute to the world beyond their private property and work together to improve them… Only by helping people connect to, care for and shape the world beyond their front doors will we be able to instill people with a capacity to redress the larger environmental crises".[33]

All three community gardens, in the Burton Street Community, the Shiloh Community, and the Pisgah View community are examples of the power of placemaking in confronting social and environmental issues. The Burton Street community website describes how DeWayne Barton and Safi Mahaba "founded the gardens at a time when the community was confronting drug trafficking, crime, and the I-26 Connector expansion".[34] Since then, the garden has attracted volunteers and youth who "nurture and expand these gardens". Wes Markusfeld explained the importance the role of a community garden in putting power in the hand of the community. He said "the whole point of a

community garden is… that the community feels like it's theirs, and contributes to it and is empowered by it and as place for congregation, a safe place". While environmentalism often discourages behaviors and calls for people to *make less impact* by reducing or stopping harmful behaviors, community garden projects create physical spaces where communities can respond to environmental and social issues by *making bigger impacts* through beneficial contributions to their community.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

This study has many limitations, and further research could be performed to assess the value of campus community collaborations. There are many other community food organizations that have collaborated with UNCA that are not represented in the study. These include the Lord's Acre, FEAST, the Ujamma Freedom Market, and countless other initiatives. This study focuses on students who had been engaged in projects for significant amounts time and thus excludes the perspectives of students who have worked on community projects for short time periods. Community interviewees were focused on community leaders, and thus exclude the perspectives of the average community members and of children. The project produced mainly qualitative data, and does not provide quantitative data regarding statistics such as how many community members and students have been involved and affected in these projects. The project was conducted over a year and a half, and thus is limited by its short duration.

5. Conclusion

Interviews demonstrated that community members' experiences of university participation were varied. Most community members experienced some benefits but saw issues in a lack of continuity and coordination on the part of the university. Professors expressed that their students benefited from an inspiration to learn more about food and/or gardening, and saw community building as a major benefit from their student's experiences. Students said that their involvement in community food initiatives was essential to their educational experience and personally transformative. While transportation and geographic isolation was one logistical barrier reported by several interviewees, issues stemming from cultural and institutional barriers and the lack of a consistent bridge between the university and the community were discussed more extensively by participants. Continuity was seen as a major barrier to student involvement and to valuable results for both parties. For campus collaboration with community food projects to be valuable to both students and community members, there needs to be a stronger bridge between the university and community organizations. Students and professors need to understand their role in the community before making commitments, and consider that community projects are ongoing while student involvement is often fleeting. In order to create valuable, long-term partnerships with the community on food-based projects the university needs to offer more support.

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