

2017

CaN Center Community Organization

Tami Montemayor

Western Oregon University, tmontemayor15@mail.wou.edu

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Recommended Citation

Montemayor, Tami, "CaN Center Community Organization" (2017). *Maurice Undergraduate Initiative Prize*. 11.
<http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/maurice/11>

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If I were to use three phrases to describe my experience while pursuing the Maurice Challenge they would be: Moving a brick wall: “White Rabbit Syndrome” (Kouri, 2010) : Chutes and Ladders. My attempts to bring three non-profits together for a collaborative project really feels like I am trying to move a brick wall; this is not impossible yet forward momentum happens in very small increments. This is the first time since my enrollment into college that I have engaged with an outside project. My world and the outside community seem so disjoint and I really feel like the White Rabbit from Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland”, “I’m late, I’m late for a very important date. There’s no time to say goody-bye, hello, I’m late, I’m late” (Carroll as per Kouri, 2010). Chutes and ladders became my roadmap because along my journey, it became apparent that the coordination of the churches meeting together for a combined potluck would be so far out that the Maurice Challenge would be over before it came together. I then found myself pursuing an objective which was not part of my initial idea. This led to an exciting event which did come together. In spite of the statement that my project would not be judged on whether or not it actually happens, I did feel that I needed tangible results for my own personal measurement of success.

My initial proposal was to engage these three, culturally diverse churches and build collective impact on a specific neighborhood. One of the churches in a CaN Center. This is a church sponsored after school program in collaboration with Salem Leadership Foundation. I did approach each of the non-profits with my ideas of intentionally engaging this particular neighborhood’s families through community based events. Each church is supportive and willing to meet for a combined potluck. When I began my project, I first consulted with my advisor and strategically began with a system in mind to really evaluate all participant’s learning. My short-sightedness is that my measurement tool is centered around actually getting the three, non-profit congregations together for a pot-luck. This gathering is scheduled to happen on June 11th, 2017.

I still will collect qualitative data at the end of this potluck. I am interested in teaching how poverty impacts families’ engagement in services, children’s learning and social stratification. I also want to share a tool which anyone can use to help a family assess the strength of their circle of support. I have included a template, (shared by a nonprofit and available for anyone’s use), to help guide families called “My Child’s Team” (Oregon Family to Family Health Information Center, 2017). This is an accurate snapshot of what a support system looks like for a family meeting their child’s needs when born affected by disability or chronic health condition.

When I studied this in my Ed class, this is called Eco-mapping. Eco-mapping in respect to Early Childhood Education has one major difference than this mapping tool. The upper portion of the map should reflect personal and familial supports. The bottom half is formal and professional supports. The objective is to assess who actually is viewed as a support by a particular family. The upper half is reflective of people who are more constant and will be around for the lifespan of the child. The bottom half is reflective of the amount of professional supports a family uses. These are people who are paid to work with the family and will constantly be changing (McWilliam, 2010). This is a simple tool that one can use to assess the strength of one's support system and where it can be enhanced.

These congregations are already participating in projects which take a holistic approach in supporting this community (Franklin, 2012). I will poll the participants of the combined church potluck to measure interest to continue in building collaborative impact. Now please don't take me wrong. There are numerous well organized projects happening throughout this area of the city. I don't want to re-invent the wheel here, I am wanting to inspire and connect people with a common focus to build a greater impact upon the neighborhoods while strengthening their community (Hampton, 2005). A lot of this can be done simply through informing and bringing all the resources together. It's connecting the dots while taking a comprehensive look together and then deciding what area to ramp up. I had the honor of participating in this style of collaborative impact when I volunteered with "It takes a Neighborhood" initiative funded by Kaiser Permanente. (Here is a link to the project: <https://public.health.oregon.gov/About/TaskForce/Documents/hb2348meetings/2-19-2014-pratt.pdf>). I worked with a wonderful team who did make a difference to our town. This is the framework that I have for building collective impact. In my enthusiasm for the Maurice Challenge, I did not stop to consider that we spent three years working on this project.

One of the greatest personal points of learning I am walking away from my project with is in my interpersonal communication. I am a nontraditional student. I have a unique perspective. I have a creative ability to look at systems (most of which I personally use or have assisted other families in navigating). In my excitement and enthusiasm, when I open my mouth to speak, I find that I am trying to share this entire, complex web of ideas with folks. People quickly become overwhelmed and confused. I am working to keeping my ideas streamline, consider the problem from another's prospective and then present the points relevant to my particular audience. Through this self-efficacy, I also came to a conclusion that I would benefit from a more concentrated focus in my career. I enter my program this summer. My newfound mantra is Early Childhood Literacy. This is the most important gift that anyone can give. This also is something that no one can take away from you. This focus will work nicely with La

Casita, The Little House, which is a bilingual literacy project of one of these churches. As I work on my master's degree in 2018, I will continue to volunteer my time and work with this neighborhood community.

Having a desire to find ways to strengthen the families of my classroom community is what led to my "Chutes and Ladders" experience. When I studied Relationship-Based Inclusive Education here at WOU, this concept held deep, personal meaning for me. Because of my personal life experiences, I value building a circle of support. I draw on my support when I need to. This is the modeling I do for any other students here on campus as well as families that I work with. Human relationships, which help children grow and blossom, support adults in the same way (Roffman & Wanerman, 2011).

One of my professors is also a motivational speaker. He agreed to donate his time to lead a thirty-minute motivational assembly at the middle school in my project's neighborhood. When I went to talk with the principal I was warned that the school was so busy, not to expect this idea to happen until next fall. When I explained to this principal that I was a teacher candidate and working on a project to better my potential student's community, she was very supportive. We looked together at some of the type of speaking that Professor John Neal Jr. does on his website. I explained that I wanted to start a movement with the youth that focused on how what they do today matters towards their education tomorrow.

This principal was onboard immediately and the assembly will take place on May 26, 2017. It will include information about the school's AVID and TRIO programs and introduce who the person at the High School these students will want to know because he will help support them with college entry activities. The theme: Now is the time for a college bound vision. It's not too early. Today's choices will determine that path. There will be 500 students in assembly. The prior week we will pass out 1000 snacks donated by churches and supporting agencies with a YouTube link attached to them. When the students go online, they will find a "shout out video" from Professor John Neal Jr. I am hoping to create a buzz of excitement about this assembly with the long-term goal of encouraging kids to follow his YouTube channel. You can experience his work at <http://johnnealjr.com/>.

Through this project, I learned that my favorite professor is currently working on his doctoral dissertation. I find it interesting that his research focusses on support, Camp TRIO and Upward Bound. I have a collaboration with a mentor who is pursuing a Doctoral degree. I also have built a professional relationship with a principal that supports and inspires my work as a future educator.

Through meeting with this principal, my direction once again led back to my starting point of this project. Salem Leadership Foundation is an intriguing and inspiring non-profit which serves as a bridge between the church communities and the schools. They partner with numerous agencies who collaborate on ideas which improve the communities surrounding each school. The principal of this middle school referred me back to the person who is the lightning rod, or coordinator, for this neighborhood. Here we go...Chutes and Ladders!

Upon connecting with Kaleb, I found support and enthusiasm for this motivational assembly project. He immediately donated the first hundred snacks. I also found a need that I could help fill. Because of my own son's disability, I have a relationship with a trainer qualified to teach a Trauma Informed Training. Kaleb felt that his organization would benefit from this training because of the foot traffic they get in the front door requesting support. My associate will come to their location and provide a two-hour training titled, "Trauma, Hope and Healing. It's a Brain Thing" for only traveling expenses. They are working out the details themselves. The community who walk into their front door are seeking support. This is an opportunity to meet someone's needs and become a support for their world. This is another example of how building relationship matters.

As I review my initial Maurice Undergraduate Initiative Challenge Proposal, the components I have not addressed yet are through the mental health supports and trainings. After Kaleb's reception of Trauma Informed Training, I am excited to be able to connect more trainings to these churches. As the potluck occurs, then a more organized request of what additional support and education can be made so that needs can be filled. I also walk away from this endeavor with a very powerful future resource in my pocket. My affiliation with our region's Medicaid Coordinated Care Organization has taught me how a health plan can support students and their families in the school setting. Willamette Valley Community Health Plan serves our region. They are restructuring their grant process. One of the future focuses will be around social determinants of health. I also learned that mini grants, under \$5,000 do not require committee approval. Their acceptance lies within the power structure of the CEO. As I build my own classroom community next year, I will keep this potential resource in mind. I did learn that my idea of a peer navigator who acts as a cultural broker within this neighborhood is already happening. It is through a collaboration with Mano e Mano and Catholic Community Services. The current CEO supports my idea but there is no reason to formally request funding because a similar program is already in existence.

I sincerely want to make a difference in life for my neighbors and the families I serve in my classroom. The driving concept behind my project is how change happens when relationships are built.

When I studied Relationship-Based Education here at WOU, I was an engaged learner. I know that through mentoring and modeling respect, sincerity and trust then my families will find services and supports meaningful to them (Roffman & Wanerman, 2011). It is only a matter of time. The churches who already are serving communities with a holistic approach continue to make a huge impact through providing a supportive and caring community. This is a natural access point for more formal social services. I am entering a position of building relationship with families and I would like to partner with the community to build hope for a better future. Some of the training which I can help connect these non-profits with are around poverty education, trauma informed and mental health and suicide prevention training for the layman working with various populations.

My biggest take-away is how a little movement creates a ripple which grows into larger rings as it expands outwards. Relationship matters. It is through the relationships I have built that I have support now. I am able to build a movement which touches someone else's life whom I otherwise would have never met. There are 500 kids at a middle school, an opportunity to partner with an award-winning teacher, and a chance to collaborate with an inspirational professor who is currently working on his dissertation. Just having a personal connection with someone who is travelling a higher path in life than you, the probability of your feet following increases as well. It is through building connections with others that you, yourself become more diverse. This is valuable beyond measure. My biggest learning? It is through allowing my pathway to climb ladders which led to slides and chutes. I did not anticipate this pathway. I did not expect to foster a middle school motivational assembly. I would like to finish with another quote from Carroll (1994). "My dear, here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere you must run twice as fast as that."

Thank you for a chance to stretch myself in the Maurice Challenge 2017 at WOU!

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