

FOSTERING FAMILY RESILIENCY THROUGH
COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT. Helping families to be resilient in the face of family life stress and changing social pressures are paramount responsibilities of graduates of family science programs. We contend that these programs can better prepare students to meet these challenges by taking advantage of the community-based learning opportunities. This article brings together the growing literatures on family resiliency and community-based learning to potentiate growth in our students' abilities to promote family well-being, while simultaneously contributing to the communities in which they are embedded and helping their university to scaffold students' civic engagement.

As the variety of stressors that impinge upon families continue to increase in scope and intensity, graduates of family studies programs will be called upon to assume a greater range of responsibilities than ever before. Helping families to be resilient in the face of family life stress and changing social pressures will be a paramount responsibility. Yet, the degree to which family studies programs are adequately preparing students to meet these challenges is not clear.

Certainly, more needs to be done to teach students to provide evidence-based and theoretically-sound information to families in need. The purpose of this article is to bring together the growing literatures on family resiliency and community-based learning to delineate methods for training future family educators and practitioners to better meet the challenges facing children, couples, and families in contemporary society.

At the same time that students and new professionals are being challenged to solve real

problems, so are universities. Issues of accountability are frequently raised by stakeholders as

KEY WORDS. Family resiliency, Family stress, Teaching family studies, Community-based learning

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universities (especially land-grant institutions) are asked to demonstrate the ways in which they serve the communities in which they are embedded. Community-based learning courses have been heralded as a key way that universities can partner with social service and educational organizations to advance the well-being of surrounding communities while simultaneously providing unique educational opportunities for students (Clawson & Couse, 1998; Denner, Cooper, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1999; Dreber & Cranton, 2000; O'Malley & Wilson, 2003; O'Neil & Lima, 2003; Waterman, 1997). However, as we discuss below, courses that feature community-based learning face a number of barriers as they are often expensive to provide, are dependent on faculty interest, time, and expertise, and rely heavily on community support.

Despite these challenges, we contend that community-based learning opportunities are instrumental tools that, if designed well, will not only better enable family science programs to train future practitioners and researchers about the reality of family issues and state-of-the-art practice strategies, but will also help them to be responsive to the needs of the communities in which they are embedded. Through its examination of theoretical conceptualizations of family stress and resiliency, this article will outline a variety of methods by which family science programs can incorporate community-based learning opportunities into their curriculum to achieve these objectives. Methods for integrating new teaching technologies into community-based learning that capitalize on online resources are also discussed.

How Families Cope with Stress – Theoretical Models

Family stress can be defined as “the state in which family members and the family as a unit are challenged by the environment in a way that overtakes their individual or collective resources and threatens the well-being of the family” (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992, p. 99).

According to Hobfoll and Spielberger (1992), family stress theory is grounded on the following

suppositions: (1) stress is normative; (2) stress can at times strain individuals' and families' coping abilities; (3) most people and families will adapt fairly well to the stresses they face; and (4) if stress is not dealt with appropriately, negative consequences will follow.

How a family defines a stressor event, coupled with its access to appropriate resources, will influence its response (Boss, 1987, 1992; Hill, 1958; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson & Garwick, 1994). In addition to the quality of supports families have access to during times of stress, a primary focus of family stress models is the family's definition of a stressor event. Often, the stressor is a situation for which families are not prepared, and therefore, consider problematic (Hill, 1958). Family systems theory (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993) argues that families can withstand minor structural changes and members of the system can adapt behaviors and meanings without significant reorganization of the functioning and beliefs of the system. It is when more major influences cause structural or functional changes to the system that family members are forced to engage in self-reflexivity and create new meanings in order to maintain balanced functioning in the system and access new sets of supports. Thus, successful adaptation is actually a continual process of maintaining and redefining the system in response to minor and major structural stressors and pressures on the system and its members.

Further refinement of the family stress model has introduced the idea that there are three levels of meaning that can influence how families adapt to stressful situations (Patterson & Garwick, 1994). The first level of meaning involves *situational meanings*, or the concrete ways in which families interpret the stressors in their lives. The second level of meaning refers to a sense of *family identity* or how families view themselves as a unit. Whereas family identities are often more stable than situated meanings (Patterson, 2002), it is important to note that for families involved in prevention and intervention programs, this basic sense of a collective

identity may be challenged by the professionals with whom they interact. Finally, the third level of meaning is the *family world view*, or the way family members interpret the world outside the family. The most abstract of the three levels of meaning, this collective understanding is often a result of shared experience (Patterson, 2002). Because interactions between family members and practitioners can shape the way in which the family system views the outside world, it is imperative for practitioners to take steps to become more culturally competent to ensure that their assistance serves to empower the family system rather than exacerbate already stressful situations.

Family Resilience

Despite the hardships that families may face, evidence remains that many families, including those experiencing great hardship, manage to successfully raise their children and support their members (Walsh, 2003). Family resilience, as a concept, is rooted in the family stress and strengths conceptual orientations that emphasize the strengths and adaptability of families rather than their pathologies (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Walsh, 2002, 2003, 2006). When discussing family resilience, we utilize McCubbin, Thompson, and McCubbin's (1996) characteristics of strong and resilient families. Resilient families are defined as those which take a proactive rather than reactive or passive approach to problem-solving; construe or reframe their experiences in positive and constructive ways; create an interpersonal climate which is affirming and supportive; develop a sense of coherence, a world view that life makes sense and that one has some control over what happens to them; and cultivate and develop a life orientation of seeking and valuing challenges and a shared sense of commitment to the family as a unit over and above that of the self. Thus, resilient families are family units, however defined, that are responsible, positively oriented, self-reliant, committed, confident, and problem-solving social

units capable of nurturing children and facing adversity and life's hardships without deterioration or disorganization (Patterson, 2002).

Following McCubbin and colleagues' set of characteristics, the paradigm underlying helping families (or training students to help families) shifts from the traditional approach of identifying a family system's pathological symptoms to highlighting their adaptive qualities and resources that can be accessed to respond to stressors. Practitioners who use this definition focus on behaviors that promote coping, endurance and survival (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Walsh, 2003). Thus, the goal of educational programs aimed at training students and professionals is to guide these individuals as they learn to support family resilience by helping family members identify existing, and garner new, tools and strategies for constructively responding to life stressors. The key elements of a family resiliency training program are to prepare students to assess, and then build on, the existing strengths, capabilities, and resources of families. Students working within a family resiliency framework learn to adopt a preventive approach so that they are working alongside families to develop their strengths, avoid negative stressors, and access resources and supports to deal with adversity (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

Application of Family Stress Theories to Practice

Family stress theory argues that, "the process of family adaptation to stressful life events is strongly influenced by meaning making" (Patterson & Garwick, 1994, p. 302). Patterson and Garwick suggested that individuals working with families using the family stress model should keep in mind three premises regarding family meanings. The first is that the meaning of a stressor influences behavioral responses. For example, the way in which a family system defines the importance or impact of an event will in part determine the resources and energy that are devoted to dealing with the stressor (Patterson, 2002). The second premise is that meanings can

be changed in the process of responding to a stressor, implying that the act of responding to the stressor can, in and of itself, alter the meaning attributed to it by the family system. And finally, that meaning is a social construction, indicating that family meanings and responses are often a product of the interactions between individuals in a particular family system.

Thus, individuals working in family resiliency programs focus on family empowerment to help families construct situational meanings whereby they view themselves as capable of dealing with the stressors they face. Empowerment fosters resilience in families' abilities to deal with stressors because it highlights the strengths and resources they have in dealing with stressors in their lives (Patterson & Garwick, 1994). Therefore, in accordance with stress theory, family resiliency programs can promote healthy family functioning through three major avenues: first, by assessing and perhaps helping family members to redefine or reframe the "meaning" of life changes as that may lead to more adaptive responses; second, by assessing and strengthening available family supports pertinent to the life change; and third, by enhancing perceptions of self-efficacy which may enable family members to enact new coping behaviors (Doherty, 1981a, b).

In addition to work in these three avenues, it is also important for practitioners to understand that families will almost always resist change (Haley, 1987). As families strive to maintain homeostasis, practitioners should be prepared to help families discover that there are new perceptions and resources that they can access which may be more beneficial for meeting the new and changing demands they face. These resources might position them to restructure and establish, what will hopefully be, a more satisfying family life. However, practitioners must realize that the process of restructuring naturally brings about new sets of stressors and demands (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). These new stressors must also be addressed, by again, helping

families to consider the meanings they ascribe to these new events, access supports and resources that are relevant to these new demands, and to consider ways to best adapt to their new circumstances (Walsh, 2006). On rare occasions, families may respond to a stressor so successfully that their new family organization actually exceeds their “pre-crisis” level of family functioning.

A Brief Overview of Community-Based Learning

While family stress theory and family resiliency models inform us about appropriate theoretical strategies with which to support families, we believe community-based learning can provide practical opportunities for students to apply that knowledge for work with families. Community-based learning enables students to engage with groups or organizations that teach them to respect and work towards advancing the needs and interests of community partners and that include occasions for structured reflection on service-related as well as discipline-specific concerns (Karasik & Berke, 2001; Proctor, 1999; Zlotkowski, 2001). Through such opportunities, students expand on classroom learning as they participate in thoughtfully designed and supervised experiences that ultimately meet the actual needs of community members. Students are provided with opportunities to integrate what they learn through their academic curriculum with what they are learning in the field through structured activities that enable them to think, talk, or write about what they did and saw during service delivery (Proctor, 1999; Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999; Zlotkowski, 2001).

In practice, community-based learning involves a deliberate connection between academic coursework and service in the community and focuses on a *mutual engagement* between the campus and the community. Family science theories, learned in the classroom, are applied to the real problems that families face. For example, family stress theory comes alive to

students when they are face to face with a child whose parents have been found to be responsible for his or her abuse. Further, what is learned through these experiences in the field is brought back to the university for further study. The relationship between the university and the community operates under a model where all involved parties – students, community-based organizations, and the university – benefit. Studies reveal that community-based learning opportunities promoting mutual engagement encourage students to learn and grow while meeting the needs of community service providers and reinforcing the value of university-community partnerships (O’Neil & Lima, 2003).

Furthermore, research has found a range of positive outcomes across three domains for students who participated in community-based learning opportunities. Specifically, participating students showed greater values development, interpersonal skills, and cognitive skills than students who did not engage in such experiences (Aberle-Grasse, 2000). With respect to values development, students revealed a greater understanding of the world and the diversity in it, an increased connection and commitment to service to their community, and increased levels of social and personal responsibility (Aberle-Grasse, 2000; Stukas, Clary, & Snyder, 1999). With respect to interpersonal skills, students displayed increased self-confidence and understanding of their limitations, improved capacity for perspective-taking and openness to new ideas, and increased feelings of personal efficacy, self-esteem, and confidence (Aberle-Grasse, 2000; Stukas et al., 1999). With respect to cognitive skills, students displayed an increased ability to critique complex social issues, the capacity to resolve conflicts effectively, the ability to create practical strategies for community action, more developed critical thinking skills, and an increased ability to view the systemic or political nature of social problems (Aberle-Grasse, 2000; Stukas et al., 1999). This last skill proves vital in helping students understand that families

often experience stress in response to systemic forces outside their control and not necessarily as a result of individual life choices.

Training Students for Work in Family Resiliency

Given the complexities involved in family coping, equipping students to work with troubled or severely stressed families requires a great deal of time and training. And, there are some issues which families face (e.g., clinical depression, suicidal ideation and behavior, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect) that are better addressed by, or in collaboration with, licensed mental health and medical professionals. However, family science programs can appropriately train undergraduate and graduate students in the skills necessary to implement prevention, education, and strength-based programs aimed at supporting families as they cope with life's challenges. Family resiliency approaches differ from other types of intervention programs in that they focus on bolstering and strengthening families through an emphasis on family success and competence (Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2003). Preventive, educative, as well as interventive strategies play an important role as family resiliency programs adopt a proactive, strength-based approach to provide families with the skills to cope with normal everyday stressors, while staying organized and maintaining necessary functions.

Students working in community-based settings through family resiliency programs are asked to view their role as helping families to adjust to normative and non-normative stressors. Normative stressors can be anticipated, and thus, education and prevention services may be quite valuable. Non-normative stressors are often unexpected and may vary greatly in their intensity and in the degree of change they precipitate. Intervention efforts are needed to either help families return to their pre-crisis level of functioning (if this is viewed as adaptive for the family), or to restructure so that they adopt a new organization that better meets current

demands. Although students may be asked to implement “packaged” family life education programs, their roles may also include helping families to clarify the problems or stressors they are facing, identifying their goals, and strategizing about the behaviors and resources they could use to achieve their goals.

To be able to provide appropriate services, it is imperative that family science programs provide students with the necessary skills to help families explore and modify the “meaning” of the stressors they face in their lives. Students must understand that the families they work with do not necessarily understand or interpret stressors in the ways that they, or their own families, do. And, they must understand that the resolution of the stress families experience will not come from making these families function in the ways that theirs do. Understanding diversity, growing in personal tolerance and developing perspective-taking are critical components of this learning process. One key set of skills that undergraduates must master is cultural competence, which in addition to being an essential ingredient of effective working relationships, enables students to better understand the ways in which their family world views may significantly differ from the families with whom they are working (Karasik & Berke, 2001). This understanding necessitates an awareness of the impact of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and social class in the shaping of world views and in families’ abilities to deal with stressors.

Just as students may initially view particular stressor events differently from the families with whom they work, they also must expect that, within a given family, individual members will have unique perceptions. McCubbin and Patterson’s (1983) family stress model anticipates that more successful adaptation will occur when family members are able to achieve consensus about the meaning of the stressor. To help family members achieve a shared understanding of the stressors they face, explore the range of options open to them, and understand the implications of

each choice, students must be taught appropriate helping strategies to assist families in exploring, identifying, and correcting misconceptions and misattributions. Thus, basic skills in communication, interviewing, and problem-solving must be included in student training.

Furthermore, students must learn to help strengthen families' access to needed resources. Much of the helping process involves connecting families with other agencies, programs, services, and information that have the potential to help them. Consequently, students must develop an awareness of existing and available resources in their communities, understand the distinction between formal and informal supports, and advocate for creative ways to help families access available resources. Because many students attend college in locations that are new to them, explicit training in identifying and accessing community resources must be provided.

Oftentimes, families already possess abilities and resources that they can use to resolve their current problem. Because families may not immediately recognize that they already possess many solutions to their problems, students can play an important role by helping families to recall the ways that they solved similar problems in the past, highlighting the abilities and resources that they have at their disposal. Empowering families' abilities to draw upon their existing skills and resources can impact the ways in which they perceive stressors and provide them with tools to curb negative outcomes resulting from the initial stressor, thereby helping them to avoid entering a crisis state.

Designing Community-based Learning Opportunities Related to Family Resiliency

One of the primary responsibilities of family science programs is to prepare students for their experiences in the field. This is an interesting challenge for most family science programs as students are likely to follow one of a wide array of career paths, including family life

education, marriage and family therapy, counseling, social work, early childhood or elementary education, child life, law, medicine, and human resources. We argue that, because of its breadth, an understanding of ways to promote family resiliency will serve as an effective foundation for students who embark on each of these paths. Our comments here are directed toward the education of students at the upper undergraduate and early graduate levels.

In general, we advocate providing students with a progression of community-based experiences that range from limited volunteer opportunities to crafting more elaborate experiences that will set a firm foundation for later professional work. Although not specific to students working in family resiliency, the following is an incomplete list of skills and topics (presumed to complement a family science curriculum) that should be addressed before and throughout the fieldwork experience: ethical standards, expectations for professional behaviors and legal responsibilities, establishing productive working relationships with clients especially those who come from diverse backgrounds, stress management, conflict management, knowledge of auxiliary resources and how to make referrals, understanding the limits of their training, and knowing how to best make use of supervision and consultation.

Students must be familiar with the code of ethics and corresponding standards for appropriate behaviors when dealing with client-provider privilege. Students must be provided with ways to maintain these ethical standards, even when their supervisors may not. Students must also be informed about their legal responsibilities upon assuming a helping role. All students who take on responsibilities in a family resiliency program must adhere to mandated reporting regulations in reporting cases of domestic violence and child and elder abuse and neglect. Further, students must be aware of the legal ramifications for not following appropriate standards. Because legal statutes and professional standards guiding practice are under constant

development and revision, students may be best directed to these policies and procedures through internet searches, with special attention to governmental and professional society sites.

Students must be trained in how to establish productive working relationships with clients, which often draws upon skills in communicating clearly, directly, and respectfully with individuals and small groups while creating appropriate boundaries. They must learn to be cognizant and respectful of diversity in the families they will be dealing with ranging from ethnic and racial differences, income, family structure and sexual orientation. Further, students must be conscious of individual factors that may influence the client-provider relationship such as differences in age (e.g., students may be younger than the clients they are serving), roles (e.g., students may not be parents, yet may be working with parents), gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class (e.g., students need familiarity with the dynamics of poverty). Students can learn these skills both through classroom instruction and through discussion boards where they respond to hypothetical vignettes and comment on others' responses.

Further, students must be trained in ways to deal with stress by providing information about the systemic causes of people's experiences. They must be provided with tools to assist others who are dealing with daily hassles, normative and non-normative life changes, as well as traumatic events and significant stressors. They must learn to develop their own abilities to conceptualize and cope with the stress they personally experience when working with families facing challenges.

In addition, students must be educated regarding the limits of their training. When faced with situations beyond the scope of their training and proficiency, students must be taught to discern when to seek supervision and make referrals (Doherty, 1995). Advice giving, a natural response to individuals in pain, is to be avoided in favor of promoting dialogues that further

understanding of the problem and that place family members in the role of problem solver. Further, students should be aware of available community agencies to which clients may be referred. Such awareness is especially important when families may be receiving assistance from multiple systems (e.g., community agencies, healthcare system, school services). Students can gain this familiarity by researching online community resource directories, such as those provided by local non-profit agencies (e.g., United Way, Mental Health Board, Family Service of America).

Research shows that helping skills are best taught and absorbed when students are provided with good models and receive a great deal of support from course instructors, classmates and site supervisors (O'Neil & Lima, 2003). To illustrate, in a capstone practicum course in Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois, the second author structures the activities and assignments for the course around the premise that beyond course content, social support is an integral component of the learning experience. Students begin course preparations in the semester before their field placement and spend time developing relationships with the instructor and teaching assistant. Once the course begins, students meet for a weekly seminar with readings and assignments that highlight a range of professional issues. This seminar also functions as a mutual support group whereby students debrief their experiences and discuss their concerns. Although both the instructor and teaching assistant contribute to these discussions, much of the discourse is directed by the students themselves. Students are provided with a list of their classmates' phone numbers and email addresses and are encouraged to turn to each other outside class time (in confidential contexts).

Finally, site supervisors are sent detailed information regarding their responsibilities and are encouraged to spend at least one hour a week with their student discussing the placement

experience and issues of professional development. This three-pronged approach nurtures students through the process of moving from the role of student to that of pre-professional or leader. Previous research supports the benefits of community-based learning for senior level students indicating that it provides opportunities to incorporate previously learned information into a contextualized frame of reference that can be applied in a professional setting (Andreasen, 2004).

Issues Unique to Family Resiliency

Whereas the previous section highlighted skills that are important to students who work with families in a variety of contexts, the following section will explore issues that may be unique to those working in family resiliency programs. Of primary importance when discussing family resiliency is helping students to fully appreciate the implications of the fact that families are multi-aged groups. Students are apt to identify with particular family members, especially children or individuals similar in age or gender. Instructors must help students to consider the potentially diverse perspectives of all family members. This reality challenges students' abilities to think about the developmental and life course needs of multiple, interconnected people and prompts them to think in terms of the system and the individual concurrently. Because families are composed of different individuals with different perspectives, goals, and needs, students must learn to balance the objectives of particular individuals with the needs of the family as a whole. Family resiliency as a construct does not deny the reality that members of the system may have competing interests. Instead, students must learn to identify what those interests are while concurrently empowering the system to function in the face of diversity.

Families are also likely to consist of individuals who are different from the community-based learner in some fundamental ways. Or, if they are similar in demographics (e.g., gender

and age), they may be in a very different life circumstance (e.g., an 18-year-old mother of two children). Learning to understand and empathize with these family members can be quite difficult. For example, students tend to easily empathize with children in families, but may need to work harder to fully understand the perspectives of parents and extended family members; such an experience will help students better appreciate the interrelated and reciprocal influences of subsystems in the family.

Furthermore, families under stress may be engaged with public and social service agencies that restrict family life in some very fundamental ways. This lack of personal control is often foreign to college students from middle income backgrounds. Students must learn to empathize with family members' feelings of lack of control and respect the fact that although students may feel as though they are there to help, the family members may view them as outsiders who are judgmental or motivated to disempower them. Finally, families who are under stress are often resistant to change and to accepting help. The power of homeostasis can be so great that even strategies that might work with individuals may not be effective with the family system. Therefore, students need to anticipate the difficulties that families may experience as they change and be prepared to respond appropriately.

In sum, family resiliency programs recognize that much of the stress experienced by families is normative, and therefore can be expected. Prevention, education, and intervention efforts can be used to help families minimize the impact of stress and to maximize proactive coping. In addition, family resiliency programs emphasize the strengths families already have and the ways in which they can harness the resources they possess to deal with adversity (Walsh, 2003). Such programs recognize the importance of helping families to formulate a shared meaning system with which they can understand the stressors and organize a response. The

strength-based philosophy of family resiliency approaches is one that does not blame the victim, but rather provides the tools and training for individuals to make their own decisions. The approach avoids expert models where practitioners delineate and direct clients' actions. Rather, in these contexts, the student/practitioner functions in the capacity of a consultant, rather than an expert, assisting family members as they make their own decisions.

Investing Resources

Having provided an overview of the benefits of community-based learning opportunities and the specific considerations for students working in family resiliency programs, we will conclude with suggestions for integrating community-based learning into family science curricula. These strategies can vary in accordance with the level of resources required for their implementation. Resources are defined in terms of both financial cost and level of faculty and student involvement. The integration of applied activities into courses can occur from low to high levels of investment, however even low investment experiences may have lasting value for students. Community-based learning can entail the introduction of new courses into a curriculum, but can also more easily entail the integration of community-based learning exercises into pre-existing courses. All community-based learning programs, regardless of level of investment, need purposeful crafting. In all instances, goals and rewards need to be clarified, materials given to students need to be carefully assessed, and methods to evaluate students' performance need to be carefully defined.

The following are examples of low, moderate, and high investment methods of integrating community based learning into course curricula.

Low Investment Methods

The most easily integrated methods often involve including one or more applied activities into an existing course. We highlight two possible strategies below:

Volunteer experiences. Students may be required to volunteer at a community service agency, one to four hours a week. Participation in a school-based tutoring or mentoring program, or visiting with elders in a nursing facility can be appropriate activities for a short-term low intensity volunteer experience. When combined with a reflective writing assignment or class discussion, this can be an effective method for enhancing students' understanding of particular social problems. Students may also participate in online discussions to reflect on their experiences and learn of the range of community-based learning opportunities in their area.

Case studies. Groups of students can be asked to collaboratively respond to carefully crafted case studies which exemplify new situations to which they need to respond (e.g., various child discipline strategies used by different types of families), new skills they may need to acquire (e.g., how to begin a conversation with a small child, how to teach parents to help children with homework), or new experiences that their clients often have (e.g., requesting financial assistance from a state agency). Students would discuss various aspects of the scenario, and then work together to devise strategies to approach the issues being addressed.

After groups devise a plan, strategies can be presented to the class or on a discussion board allowing all groups to share their scenarios and responses. These kinds of activities develop students' perspective-taking skills and allow them to reflect on both their experiences and the experience of their future clients. They also help students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they examine alternate strategies and think through how to make the

best selection. By bringing in cultural, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and gender issues, students learn to consider how different solutions may be appropriate in different contexts.

Moderate Investment Methods

The next level would involve structuring an entire course so that students obtain more intensive community-based learning experiences along with didactic supervision.

Practicum in family studies. Departments may provide a one-semester practicum course in which undergraduates work, under professional supervision, 12 to 20 hours per week, at a community agency that provides services aimed at promoting family resiliency. The creation of a learning plan is essential so that students and site supervisors have a clear and detailed record of the students' learning objectives along with the activities that they will perform to achieve each objective. Progress is monitored at weekly seminar meetings and site visits. This is critical for assuring that students are given appropriate levels of responsibility on site.

During a weekly seminar meeting, course discussion focuses on issues pertaining to ethics and professional behaviors, cultural diversity, interviewing skills, record keeping, and report writing. In addition to maintaining a journal of their reflections for the duration of the fieldwork placements, students are also required to write a reflection paper at the beginning and conclusion of their fieldwork placements. Students may also be asked to respond to online discussion board questions focusing on issues of professional development such as ethics, workplace climate, and strategies for developing rapport with clients. Providing opportunities for students to interact outside the classroom facilitates a more cohesive learning community. Emphasis is placed on students' personal and professional development as they move from considering themselves to be "just students" to adopting the role of an emerging professional.

Structured seminar. Departments may also structure a seminar or course to meet a goal that would mutually benefit the students, community agency and faculty. For example, a course could be structured around the need to develop effective materials for educating pregnant adolescents about parenthood. Students would refer to the research literature to learn about the process of pregnancy, relevant biological and nutritional information, health concerns, legal issues, the psychosocial concerns of pregnant adolescents and their partners, parents, and extended family, and ways to help adolescents step into the role of parent (e.g., how to establish appropriate expectations for children, how to set rules, discipline, establish routines).

Beyond library research, class assignments could also include conducting interviews with adolescent parents to better assess their needs. Interviews could also be conducted with relevant personnel in the community to learn about the types of materials and resources that are already available for this population, and to better assess the community's needs in serving this population. Secure course websites can aid in disseminating and sharing the information collected by students and can be easily accessed by both students and community agencies. Through this educational process, students learn and the community agency receives inexpensive and effective help.

High Investment Methods

Finally, community-based learning experiences representing higher investments on the part of students and faculty relate to the restructuring of undergraduate and graduate programs to include more extensive applied training opportunities in family resiliency.

A sequence of applied courses. At the undergraduate level, this may entail offering a sequence of courses that teach rudimentary skills in helping, leadership, establishing effective working relationships with a wide range of families, and in understanding the relevance of issues

of cultural diversity. A two- or three-semester sequence of coursework could be developed in which the first semester is devoted to professional issues (ethical behaviors and other issues central to becoming a helping professional such as mastering interview techniques, establishing productive relationships with clients, goal formation, etc). Additional coursework on developing family resiliency programs or conducting workshops could accompany a year-long internship at a community agency. At the graduate level, a sequence in applied coursework that covers program development, program evaluation, and family-relevant policy can prepare students for careers in social service, policy, and governmental agencies and research institutes.

University-community partnerships. At a grand level, collaborations could be formed between multiple university units and community organizations that are aimed at enhancing a network of resources and knowledge in a general area. Student learning is a key facet of this collaboration. For example, a “coalition of care” for homeless families in the university could be developed with partners representing community-based agencies such as transitional housing programs, regional planning commissions, child care programs, school, United Way, Urban League, and health care programs, along with university-based faculty from human development and family studies, community health, urban and regional planning, human nutrition, nursing, among others. Students can serve, along with these professionals, on multidisciplinary teams that are charged with the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services to address the needs of homeless families. Didactic information could be covered in a seminar taught by faculty and community professionals from multiple disciplines. Models such as these are under development at the Family Resiliency Center at the University of Illinois.

Conclusion

Given the changes in U.S. society over the last two decades, scholars are increasingly recognizing the unique role that family practitioners play in assisting families in developing and strengthening abilities to cope with the stressors of daily living (O'Malley & Wilson, 2003). This paper has highlighted the role community-based learning through family resiliency programs can play in better preparing graduates of family studies programs to engage in such work. We have examined the theoretical conceptualizations of family stress and resiliency and discussed their contribution to the development of appropriate training practices for family science students. Further, we have provided an initial framework that family science departments can apply in developing and strengthening their university-community partnerships. Future research should aim to empirically substantiate the skills students gain as a result of community-based learning experiences, the benefits to community organizations and to universities of such partnerships and finally, the skills families develop as a consequence of participation in these strengths-based programs. If done well, the benefits can be immense.

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