INTEGRATING COMMUNITY INTO THE CLASSROOM
Community Gardening, Community Involvement, and Project-Based Learning

REGINA DAY LANGHOUT
JULIAN RAPPAPORT
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
DORETHA SIMMONS
Woodson Elementary School

This article is about the tensions faced in facilitating the relationship between teachers and community members while working toward a community garden project. The authors adopt an ecological model for effective classroom-community collaboration and discuss how this process unfolded in the current setting. Two classroom projects serve as exemplars of culturally relevant classroom-community collaboration. The garden project is evaluated through classroom-community collaboration models. This evaluation includes a discussion of common and disparate goals of teachers and community members and how differences are navigated in the current milieu.

It is widely known that in the North American public school context, African American children are academically behind their White counterparts. Indeed, Alexander and Entwisle (1988) found that although African American and European American children

AUTHORS' NOTE*: Portions of this article were presented at the meeting of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, June 2000, Minneapolis. This research was partially supported by a National Institute of Mental Health National Research Service Award, No. MH14257, to the University of Illinois and by a grant from the University of Illinois' Partnership Illinois program to Julian Rappaport and Thom Moore. The research was conducted while the first author was a predoctoral trainee in the Quantitative Methods program*

URBAN EDUCATION, Vol. 37 No. 3, May 2002 323-349
© 2002 Corwin Press, Inc.

began first grade with roughly equivalent standardized math scores, by the second year of school African American children scored lower on the standardized math tests. Moreover, African American children had lower marks on their grade reports.

This trend of findings regarding lower test scores for African American children compared to their European American counterparts is so consistent that many social scientists have moved from studying the differences to studying why there are differences and potential remedies. Sarason (1997) pointed to the disenfranchisement of both students and teachers as a main antecedent of failing schools. Because of structural inequities in our society, African American children, as a group, are more negatively influenced by this disenfranchisement. Ogbu (1991, 1997) discussed African American strategies for coping with a dominant oppressive culture. Apple's (1992) conception is that power is unequally distributed in society and is (re)produced in the classroom via teacher control, the visible pedagogy (subject centered and tightly controlled classrooms), and the invisible pedagogy (child centered and loosely controlled). Teacher control and the invisible and visible pedagogies are introduced through the content of schooling (the curriculum) and the process of schooling (how the curriculum and other lessons are taught; Apple, 1992, 1996). The underlying message is that certain types of knowledge are considered valuable and are privileged over other types of knowledge (Heath, 1983). The largely White, male, heterosexist assumptions remain intact and are transmitted to children in the school setting (Apple, 1996). These assumptions may not be commensurate with African American children's experiences (e.g., the myth that everyone can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps is inconsistent with knowledge that racism prevents African American men from being

---

of the Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Parts of this manuscript were written while the first author was at Wesleyan University. The authors would like to thank Eriko Grossman, David Osta, Jacelya Clay, Tim Dowling, Andrea Ray, Monica Richburg, the teachers and children at Woodson Elementary School, and the Brighton Park Neighborhood Association and Woodson Friends for their contributions to this article and support of this project.* *Regina Day Langhout is now at Wesleyan University, and correspondence should be addressed to her at the Department of Psychology, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06459; e-mail: rlanghout@mail.wesleyan.edu*

hired). Although there are differences in theory as to the reasons why African American children are oppressed in the school setting, one common theme is that the experiences of African American children are not valued, and a potential solution is to value the experiences of African American children and families through school-community collaborations and culturally relevant schooling.

It has been argued since as early as the 1930s that schools cannot be reformed effectively unless the school ecosystem is taken into consideration (Counts, 1932; Kilpatrick, 1932). This argument also enjoys current attention (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 2000; Keith & Keith, 1996; Sarason, 1997; Trickett, 1997). In essence, effective school reform must involve taking the neighborhood and community context into consideration via school-community collaboration. Here, community is defined as a supportive network of relationships that can be found and used (Sarason, 1974) within close geographic proximity (i.e., the blocks that surround the school or the neighborhoods where children who attend the school live). Taking community and neighborhood into consideration when thinking about school change seems logical if one considers Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model.

Bronfenbrenner discussed five systems or contexts that influence development or change: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The systems are not mutually exclusive, and they interact with one another. The microsystem includes the characteristics of the individual such as age, gender, race, and temperament. The mesosystem is the second level of the model and includes the individual's immediate environment such as school, family, and neighborhood. The exosystem, or third level of the model, includes the social and economic context. The macrosystem comprises cultural context, values, customs, beliefs, ethnic identity, regional differences, laws, and education. The final level of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model is the chronosystem. The chronosystem includes the historical context and cohort effects. One cannot hope to have much effect on mesosystem change (i.e., school) without enlisting resources from other related systems (e.g., the home, the neighborhood).

Most models for school-community collaboration are based on John Dewey's (1916) analysis. He maintained that schooling that engages students would be based on students' personal interests and would facilitate an open dialogue and exchange of ideas. This kind of learning would take place when students could observe and interact with the phenomenon of interest. This hands-on approach to discovery leads to a fuller understanding of that being studied. Schools should therefore be directly involved in life interactions. Interacting with the real world allows students to make connections between life, real-world problems, and learning.

Dewey's observations are a natural fit for schools developing community collaborations. These community collaborations create a bridge to the real world and can bring real-world problems and, hence, learning opportunities into the classroom. For many years, others have pointed out that until this bridge exists, education will lack meaning and vitality (Counts, 1932). These connections, by necessity, also create connections between students and other community members that are an important component of the school-community collaboration (Kilpatrick, 1932).

Both Trickett (1997) and Keith and Keith (1996) outlined current models for school-community collaboration. Trickett (1997) argued that environmental assessment, the development of a collaborative style, and mutually empowering collaborations must be embedded in the school-community collaboration if it is to be effective. In the assessment phase, individual expertise is discovered. In other words, community assets are mapped. For the collaboration to be reciprocal, all individual knowledge should be seen as important and valid so that community knowledge is considered as important as school-based knowledge. Once strengths are recognized, collaborations can be built that are beneficial to all parties involved because the collaborations are built on strengths; both school and community are viewed as important contributors. Keith and Keith (1996) outlined a similar model for examining school-community collaboration. In this construction, capacities of local residents are identified and used as building blocks for collaboration, social networks are strengthened through the collaboration,

and education and training opportunities are expanded into the community and made available for students and other residents.

Inherent in both models is the idea that there are strengths in the community that can be built upon in teaching children to be lifelong learners. It is important to note that in both models, the emphasis is not on finding the deficits in the community and then creating resources in the school as a way to compensate for community problems. Rather, it is believed that there is motivation and worthwhile knowledge in the community. Collaboration will locate that knowledge and a motivation to learn in the classroom will become more evident once appropriate projects and curriculum are designed (Keith & Keith, 1996).

Some teachers and researchers have used collaborative models in order to create classrooms that are more culturally relevant for their students (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Moll, 1997). Shirley Brice Heath (1983) has documented student engagement in projects that are designed to be community focused. For example, at one high school, students brought warranties in to school from home. These warranties served as reading material, and students then "translated" the warranties into more user-friendly language. In another example, fifth-grade students interviewed local farmers about their growing techniques and then researched these methods to determine which were based in which scientific theory. The former project grew out of community and student interest (having a better understanding of warranties), and the latter was based on a community strength (farming).

Luis Moll (1997) has also focused on community strengths and knowledge, which he calls "funds of knowledge," or knowledge that is important and assumed in household activities. In his research, teachers become ethnographers in search of the funds of knowledge in their classroom children's homes. By discovering these funds, teachers can bring them into the classroom and teach children from a familiar knowledge base. Like Sarason (1995), Moll (1997) noted that teacher interaction in the community helps to break down stereotypes and misconceptions often held by teachers about students and their families.

Wigginton (1989) conceived the Foxfire approach to teaching and learning. According to this methodology, student learning is based on student interest and action (i.e., a hands-on approach). Students and teachers make connections between the project, community, and world. Projects are presented to parents and other community members (Starnes, 1999; Starnes, Paris, & Stevens, 1999). Similarly, Katz and colleagues (Katz, 1994; Katz & Chard, 1998) have focused on the project approach, also known as project-based learning. Through this pedagogy, the community can be called upon to collaborate in classroom activities both inside and outside the classroom. Project-based learning consists of in-depth investigation of a topic in which children are interested. An appropriate topic is one that fits in with the school's cultural context, has available community resources, has the opportunity to be directly observed, and facilitates parent participation. Katz and Chard (1998) recommended choosing a topic that is available in children's immediate environments to facilitate direct observation. Additionally, projects based on local phenomena increase the chances that children have already had some exposure to or experience with the topic of interest. Finally, project-based learning should not be seen as an extra, but instead should be integrated into the curriculum so that subjects (such as math, history, science, language) can be taught using the project as an example.

THIS STUDY

This study attempted to facilitate culturally relevant, ongoing, project-based learning in four classrooms in an elementary school. Before this process is examined, the project used as the focal point (a community garden), the community members (including Brighton Park Neighborhood Association and Woodson Friends), teachers, children, and university members (Partners for Progress) involved in the project are discussed. Next, two classrooms in particular are examined, and the classroom-community collaboration is assessed via the models proposed by Trickett (1997) and Keith and Keith (1996) for assessing the process and outcomes of the school-community collaboration.

THE SETTING

CARTER G. WOODSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL[1]

Woodson Elementary School is in a new school building completed in the fall of 1998. It replaced an existing school, Lincoln Elementary, built in 1908 and located one block north of the new school. Lincoln Elementary was the last neighborhood school on the northeast side of Corbel, the traditional African American and working-class area of the town. Corbel is a moderately sized Midwestern town. Most of the northeast Corbel neighborhood schools were closed in the 1960s and 1970s for desegregation purposes and because Corbel's population grew in the south. The students at Woodson Elementary are approximately 70% African American.

With respect to the personnel at Woodson, the teaching staff is mostly female and European American. Most teachers do not live in the neighborhoods surrounding Woodson School. On the other hand, most of the nonteaching staff are African American and from the surrounding neighborhoods. The current principal, Ms. Banks, is an African American woman who has lived in the community for about 30 years. She taught third grade at Lincoln until her appointment as principal in December 1997. Before she was appointed there was a period of instability at the school, with four principals in 5 years.

When the work reported here was conducted, the Corbel school district was under investigation from the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights for forced bussing, potential differential treatment of African American students, and African American students not receiving Title One funding and programs for which they may be eligible. An audit showed that African American students were disproportionately overrepresented in special education, remedial classes, and behavioral violations, underrepresented in gifted classes, and lacking Title One services. Based on this audit and the threat of a class-action lawsuit, the district entered into negotiations with the potential class of complainants. The agreement reached was that the schools in the district would become "schools of controlled choice," theoretically meaning that any fam-

ily in town could choose which school to send their child to, with the district balancing parental choice based on race so that no single school would be racially identifiable (i.e., more than approximately 50% African American or more than approximately 85% European American). This plan would also reduce the number of African American children who were forcibly bussed to other schools. In accordance with this decision, each school adopted a theme unique to that school. The themes should serve as a way for parents to choose the school best suited to their child. After much deliberation among teachers and with the district, Woodson chose project-based learning as their theme, effective beginning the 2000-2001 school year.

BRIGHTON PARK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Brighton Park Neighborhood Association was established in 1994. Most members of the neighborhood association are in the same kin network and migrated to Corbel from the southern United States. The Brighton Park neighborhood is predominantly African American and is located approximately two blocks east of Woodson School. The neighborhood association, which is almost exclusively female, began because residents were concerned about illegal activities in their park. Members range in age; at the time of this study, the youngest member was in fourth grade and the oldest members were grandmothers in their 60s. Brighton Park Neighborhood Association wanted to be assured that the park was safe and inviting for neighborhood children. To that end, the association became a driving force in the neighborhood. They lobbied to get new park equipment installed, replacing equipment that was 20 years old. They also have held annual events for neighborhood residents such as Fun Day, Back to School Day, Clean-Up Day, and a Members' Picnic.

WOODSON FRIENDS

Woodson Friends is a relatively new neighborhood group that formed as a neighborhood watch in 1998. This neighborhood is one

block west of the school. Its members are predominantly European American and balanced with respect to gender. Woodson Friends is interested in reducing neighborhood crime and "taking back their streets." They formed a neighborhood walk, during which neighbors patrol the area. They believe that their visibility in the area will reduce the attractiveness of the neighborhood for criminal activity. Woodson Friends has also been active in reminding people that public behavior is public. For example, they have put video cameras up in homes that face the street to record criminal activity. Overall, the group feels successful in reducing drug traffic, prostitution, and fighting in their neighborhood.

PARTNERS FOR PROGRESS

As a way to increase resources at the school, a previous principal at Lincoln Elementary sent letters to businesses, university departments, and organizations within the community, seeking partners. Two professors and a social worker from the psychology department of the local university attended an organizational meeting the principal had scheduled. These three and one individual from a local business were the only people to respond to the call for partners (Good et al., 1997). This business ended up not becoming involved as a partner. The three individuals from the psychology department formed Partners for Progress, a group consisting of faculty and graduate students who work to bring resources into the school. Additionally, the graduate students supervise undergraduates who work in the school and community on a number of projects. This structure follows the educational pyramid model (O'Hearn & Gatz, 1996; Seidman & Rappaport, 1974), with a few professors supervising graduate students who, in turn, supervise undergraduates. This model allows for more complete saturation of the setting.

Since Partners for Progress formed in 1994, they have targeted their efforts toward breaking down the barriers between school and community. Initially, Partners for Progress worked to increase meaningful and substantive parent involvement in the school (see Good et al., 1997; Rappaport & Moore, 1999). The group also cre-

ated a transition program for children graduating from elementary school and beginning middle school. More recent projects include a community garden, a public arts project, an after-school reading program, and a church volunteer program. Partners for Progress has become a part of the school, perhaps due in part to the fact that the group has outlasted four principals and about half of the teachers.

LINCOLN-WOODSON COMMUNITY GARDEN

One strategy of Partners for Progress is to build bridges, based on community strengths, between school and community. The goal is to have school staff view the community as a resource, and community members view the school as a resource. When Woodson School was being built, a few teachers were interested in creating a children's garden in the courtyard area of the school. The courtyard was in the center of the school and not visible to those passing by. Because of the work of Partners for Progress, we knew that there were many homes with beautiful flower and vegetable gardens in the area. Presumably, there were experts in the community who if asked would be willing to collaborate with school staff to build a garden on the school grounds. The first author spoke with Ms. Banks (before she was promoted to principal she was a second-grade teacher in the school) about extending the vision of a school garden in the center of the school to a community garden along the perimeter of the school. Such a garden would be accessible to the school *and* community and could serve as a bridge for school and community to come together. Additionally, such a garden could facilitate the creation of new relationships between teachers and community members. Because community members would be the experts, teachers would have to rely on community members for information about gardening and urban agriculture. Ms. Banks agreed, and Partners assisted her in writing a grant for the garden. She received the grant and soon after was appointed as principal of the school. Four other teachers were also interested in the garden and began to work with Partners to integrate the garden into their classroom.

Lincoln-Woodson Community Garden is a collaboration between Woodson Elementary School, Brighton Park Neighborhood Association, Woodson Neighbors, and Partners for Progress. The project began through the organizing efforts of the first author of this article, a European American woman from a working-class background who was a member of Partners for Progress. In addition to teacher interest and community expertise, many neighborhood residents were older and, as such, might be retired, thus having potentially more free time to develop and maintain a community garden. These facts served as a moment of opportunity (Good et al., 1997) to broaden the teachers' concept of the children's garden to a community garden that might structure and facilitate community involvement with the school.

For several years, four European American teachers (i.e., one second grade, two third grade, and one fourth/fifth grade) and the library aide have been involved in the garden. Involved teachers have worked to integrate the community garden into their class curricula. Partners for Progress has served as a support for this effort, helping to identify resources for the classroom. Although the first author has left the area, the project continues and receives ongoing support from Partners.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT SCHOOLING VIA CLASSROOM-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AT WOODSON ELEMENTARY

Following the educational pyramid model (O'Hearn & Gatz, 1996; Seidman & Rappaport, 1974), the first author offered a class to four undergraduates who began to work with her to locate expertise in the community and facilitate teachers and community members working together. By going door to door, undergraduates were able to locate 17 community members who said they were interested in getting involved in some way with the community garden. One community member spoke with the undergraduates for 45 minutes, giving what one undergraduate called "the state of the community address." Community members were interested in the garden for multiple reasons. Some people wanted the garden to be

the first garden in a series of neighborhood gardens and thought the gardens could pressure the last remaining area supermarket to reduce produce prices, which were thought to be artificially high because of a lack of competition. Another community member thought that if children knew more about plants, they would stop "tromping through" her flowers and treat her plants with the respect they deserve. Another community member wanted children to learn about worms and composting as a method of recycling.

What makes the community garden curriculum integration culturally relevant with respect to schooling in this particular context is the fact that many children had been involved with gardening or small-scale farming with parents and grandparents. Many children were familiar with plants, plot layout, watering schedules, and foods that grow well in the local climate. For example, one classroom activity consisted of children's drawing their vision of the community garden. Many children got out rulers and drew specific plants (all labeled) in rows. One child was concerned about drawing his sketch to scale so that it could be followed easily in the garden. These specific details were not discussed in the class prior to children drawing the garden; this information came with children from their communities. In many cases, it was apparent that children knew more about gardening than some of the teachers. On more than one occasion, teachers expressed amazement that their children, whom they did not think of as knowledgeable, knew so much about gardening. The reasons attributed to the children's knowledge were varied. One teacher thought children knew so much about vegetables because they were always hungry (did not get enough food at home) and were thus fixated on food. Other teachers thought children had been exposed to gardening at home.

TWO PROJECTS

Two classroom projects serve as good exemplars of how the community garden and community collaboration have been used in the classroom. The first example occurred over the 1998-1999 school year and the second over the 1999-2000 school year.

PROJECT 1: THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL

During the 1998-1999 school year, a second-grade teacher was involved with the community garden. Although she wanted to be involved with the garden, she did not put much effort into planning a garden-related curriculum, evidenced by the fact that she rarely attended planning meetings and told the undergraduates that she had not planned garden-related activities outside of the planning time. After some persistent phone calls and in-person follow-up by the undergraduates, she chose a class project. She decided that she wanted to work with her students to create a three-dimensional model of the garden. She consulted with the two undergraduates who were assigned as resource people for the garden. Her students, as well as students from the three other classes involved in the garden, drew pictures of what they wanted the community garden to look like after a discussion about community, gardening, and community gardening. These pictures were then given to a community member from Woodson Friends. He took the pictures home and created a schematic of the garden. He brought the drawing to the school. At this point, the teacher from the second-grade classroom showed the class the drawing. They discussed the drawing and materials needed to make a dimensional model of the drawing. In the following weeks, the students, the undergraduates, and the teacher worked to make the different components of the garden (e.g., arbor, raised vegetable beds, perennial flower beds, benches, wildflower area, grass). One undergraduate said that before the lesson, the teacher was concerned that the students would not be able to produce the components because they would be too difficult for them to make. Below is his impression of how the lesson went:

> One thing I noticed was the enthusiasm and energy . . . in the room. This came from the teacher, the kids, and us as well. Everyone seemed to do so well. I must admit that I was nervous about making the arbor, the benches, and the compost, but it all went real well. . . . Another thing that happened was the kids really connected with us and their teacher today. They were all excited, using their own ideas, moving about the class to show and compare their work, and teaming up with each other. (D.O. field note, 2/5/1999)

Another undergraduate echoed the enthusiasm the teacher and the students exhibited:

> Everyone was completely concentrating on their work, and no one was bored and left their table. Everyone seemed to have a lot of fun making the model. . . . First, everyone wanted to make the water fountain, but we decided to divide the work by "stone, scissors, and paper" method. I think that everyone did a wonderful job. Everyone contributed to the water fountain, and it turned out to be a very fancy fountain with a statue in the center, and the other group added water made of ribbons with glitter. When I first gave the students clay, they said they didn't know how to make things. However, after I showed them how to shape it just a little, they immediately learned how to shape it into what they wanted to make. I thought this was wonderful. They were excited about what they made, and showed it to their teacher over and over. She praised the kids every time they showed it to her. (E.G. field note, 2/5/1999)

Each piece of the garden made by the children was movable; once the children had the model together in a way that represented the drawing, they were able to move the pieces to different places in the garden that they liked better. This resulted in the addition of a swing set in the middle of the garden near some benches (so parents and grandparents could sit and watch children). Additionally, some trees were added to provide more shade in resting areas. The model was then displayed in the school so that community members could see it and think about possible changes to the model. Community members liked the model that the children had built (it was even to scale!) and agreed that more trees should be added to the garden.

During the course of this project, children were engaged in this activity in ways that were different from what the undergraduates had observed during other times in the classroom. In general, they thought the children were working together and enjoyed the activity. Some children showed creativity in the way they put together benches, corn stalks, and other materials. The undergraduates felt that the children had been given a chance to be creative, to learn math in a way that was meaningful and fun (determining the appropriate size of different parts of the garden), and learn from each other. One undergraduate was put in charge of working with a

group to make benches. He said he had no idea how this would work, but the children began to assess the materials they had and worked together to figure out how to make the benches. He learned from them how to use the materials to make the benches.

Overall, however, the undergraduates were most taken by the change in the teacher. In the previous weeks they had described her behavior as cold and distant from her class. Through the course of making the garden model, her expectations of what the children could do changed. For example, she had said that the children would never be able to make the pieces of the garden to scale, and they would not be able to make parts of the garden from raw materials. As the children came closer and closer to completing the assignment, the teacher stopped spending as much time looking for disobedient behavior and started smiling, calling the children "honey," and praising them for their work. One undergraduate conveyed the following story:

> I went to the school at the end of the day. Once there, I saw the teacher with a big smile. She told me how much she enjoyed the project and was proud of her students. The above statement is very important because, remember, she used to underestimate her students' ability earlier. Now she says things like, "I'm so proud of them. I'll show the model to other teachers; they would be surprised that second graders actually made the model." (E.G. field note, 2/5/1999)

Once the project was displayed, other teachers began to ask the second-grade teacher about the work that her class had done. She began to collaborate with other teachers on how they could do similar projects. One class made dioramas based on this collaboration.

Although this project had a positive influence on the children and the teacher, some components of the project were less effective than they could have been. For example, this teacher did see her children work in ways that she had not expected and began to interact with her children in different ways, but these effects did not seem to generalize to times outside of gardening time or to other students in the school. Additionally, the community collaboration that was a part of this project was minimal. The students had little

interaction with community members and did not have much of an opportunity to learn from them. Even if the teacher had invited the Woodson Friends resident into the school to work with the children, this may not have been possible because of his conflicting work schedule. Finally, the collaboration that did transpire happened at different times; community members viewed the model in the evening when the second graders were not present, and children made changes to the model during the day when the community members were not present. One may argue that collaboration should include working together in a way that each group has a voice in the process. In this example, the children and community members had a voice in the process of deciding what the garden would look like but they did not have a face-to-face interaction. Overall, however, the project resulted in some teachers and community members working together in ways that had not occurred in the past. Additionally, children experienced their classroom, teacher, and learning as fun and joyful.

PROJECT 2: A TASTE OF WOODSON COMMUNITY COOKBOOK

In the 1999-2000 school year, two third-grade classes took a community collaboration approach in their classrooms. One teacher in particular wanted to work with her students to create a cookbook and to produce "A Taste of Woodson," an event at the school that would be open to the community where people could come, taste different foods that were featured in the cookbook, and buy the cookbook. The event would serve as a way for more teachers to meet more community members. The two teachers wanted to make a cookbook that had recipes and pictures of those community members, parents, children, and teachers who submitted recipes. In the classes, students started out by learning where recipes come from and how they are used. Below is an excerpt from the field notes of one undergraduate, who led the class discussion the day they talked about recipes.

> The first question that I asked the students was what was a recipe. A few hands shot up. One student said that it was for making things. I said right and then pointed to the recipe and said that this is one for

> greens. After the title "Greens" on the sheet of paper, I pointed to the ingredients and read the ingredients to the class. They were three bushels of greens: either mustard, collard, or turnip greens, 1 hamhock and a dash of salt. After I read the ingredients, the teacher said out loud, "Remember when the women from the cafeteria came in with the greens that they had made for us? This is the recipe." A few students nodded their heads or said "Ahhh" out of memory. Then I asked the students what did greens look like. I called on a student, who had his hand raised, and he said that they had lots of leaves. Then I asked the class where did hamhocks come from. Another student raised her hand and I called on her. She said "um, um, um" and looked at the ceiling, then she said "pig" in an unsure way. I said right. Then I pointed to the bottom of the page that had the directions for how to mix the ingredients together. I told the class that another important part of the recipe was the directions for how to mix everything together. . . . Then I asked the class why it is important to wash the leaves. A student said because the leaves had dirt on them and then another student added that there could also be chemicals on the plant. I said good and reiterated that it was important to wash the leaves. Then I read the next part of the recipe which said to put the leaves into the boiling water, add a dash of salt and to let them cook for an hour and a half. Then I asked the class how did we know when the greens were done. One student said, without raising his hand, "You put hot sauce on them and eat them with cornbread." . . . Then another undergraduate told the class why we were talking about recipes. She said the class was going to put a cookbook together of recipes that the students had gathered from other people and then we were going to sell these at the Taste of Woodson in April. I told the class that the next time we came in, we would write letters to our families asking them for recipes. (A.R. field note, 2/11/2000)

It is evident from the field note that the children in the class had had experience with recipes and the food that was being discussed. Women from the Brighton Park Neighborhood Association, some of whom had been hired to work in the cafeteria after they got involved with the community garden, had been in the school in the fall and had harvested greens with the children and had then taken them home, washed and cooked them, and also made cornbread, candied yams, and a roast. They brought these things to the school and sat with the children and told them about growing up in the South and the community garden. The children had remembered

this activity and instances from their homes that allowed them to be engaged and vocal in the conversation. In this class, the students also talked about measurement and how measurement was important for recipes and other things. Here, components of math were also discussed, and students were engaged and giving answers, perhaps because they were familiar with the base of knowledge being drawn from.

Next, students wrote letters to people they knew, asking them to submit a recipe for the cookbook. The undergraduates then took the letters and mailed them. Students were excited that their parents, grandparents, and so forth received the letters. Students also made announcements at school about getting more recipes, and they made banners and posters to put up around the school asking for recipes and publicizing the Taste of Woodson. Teachers were not sure what to expect from the Taste of Woodson. In all cases, their expectations were exceeded. For example, teachers were not sure how many recipes they would get. They hoped to get about 50. They ended up getting approximately 140 recipes, and approximately half of the families or children came to the school on another occasion to have their pictures taken for the cookbook. The Taste of Woodson night was combined with Family Fun Night, an annual school event with booths and games for children. The school was brimming with children, families, and community members. The table allocated for food and cookbooks was overflowing. That night, we sold approximately 150 recipe books.

As with the previous project, there were some positive aspects to this project and some areas for improvement for future projects. The children in these two classes played a role in organizing the Taste of Woodson. They enjoyed the leadership role that this gave their class. For example, each day students would make announcements over the intercom about the Taste of Woodson and what they needed other students to do next. Students from these two classes also got to make signs and hang them, thus displaying their work in multiple locations around the school, a component of project-based learning or the Foxfire approach. Students brought family into the school to have their pictures taken, and they were excited about the cookbooks, tasting foods that were in the cookbook and making

them. With respect to curriculum integration, students learned about some math concepts and practiced their writing during the project. They also practiced teamwork when it came to making signs and determining where to hang the signs.

Additionally, there was room for improvement with respect to community collaboration. Although there was an excellent turnout for the Taste of Woodson, many people who came were parents and other relatives. Although some efforts were made to reach out to the larger neighborhood community in terms of direct mailing and advertising the event on the school sign, there did not appear to be many people at the school who were not tied in some way to the school. It has been difficult to get community members to the school in the past, and this effort was an improvement over past events. Drawing a crowd from the larger community and beginning relationships with newcomers can serve as a way to bring even more community resources into the school. Additionally, besides children writing letters to parents, relatives, or other community members asking for recipes, children had limited involvement in publicizing the event outside of the school itself. Including children in the planning and legwork of the publicity could have been another way to get children more involved in the activity.

COMMUNITY GARDEN—COLLABORATION OR COOPERATION?

In this section, we discuss the tensions involved with this classroom-community collaboration, the goals of school staff and the goals of community members, and finally, we evaluate this collaboration via Trickett's (1997) and Keith and Keith's (1996) models for classroom community collaboration.

As a community psychologist, the first author was positioned both inside and outside of the school in terms of the classroom-community collaboration and the community garden; she spent about equal amounts of time in the school and community. One similarity between teachers and community members that has become apparent is that both groups are interested in children's education. The teachers involved with the garden, however, seem to

view the community collaboration and the garden as an extra; it is not integrated into the classroom curriculum to the extent that it could be, partly because teachers spend much of their school day focused on preparing students for standardized tests and meeting the demands of the district-mandated curriculum.

Woodson Elementary typically has the lowest test scores in the district, and teachers feel constantly pressured to increase test scores via more student drilling and teaching test-taking strategies. Although a community garden could be used to teach children concepts that are on standardized tests, these links are not likely to be made, perhaps because of the perceived constant pressure from the district administration and the current pedagogical paradigm that emphasizes traditional classroom teaching techniques. Perhaps because of these pressures, some teachers complain about garden-planning time and say they are too busy to make the monthly meeting. One teacher does not plan garden time and anticipates that the undergraduates will plan the lesson. Additionally, community members are viewed as having limited resources. As such, teachers spend little time in the community and in the garden outside of school time. Teachers say that they are tired once school is out and they want to go home and not come back to the school to work in the garden or to attend a meeting. Because many of the teachers live outside of town, and none of the four teachers involved with the garden live in the neighborhood, driving 15 miles home and back to school is difficult. Additionally, if teachers' efforts to work outside the standard mandated curriculum are unsupported, then volunteering more time when already underpaid and unsupported can be difficult. Perhaps as a result of the above challenges, the garden is seen as secondary rather than as a tool for teaching a curriculum or as a place of common ground from which to build on children's experiences.

Lack of teacher involvement in the garden during evening times seems to have created a situation in which teachers have not built relationships with community members that go beyond thinking of community members as people who can be useful to them in the school building. It should be noted that teachers inviting community members into the school is a step forward, and one that did not

happen overnight. It took many months for teachers to be comfortable enough with the community garden project to feel like they could give up some of their classroom control by inviting community members into their classrooms. The times that community members have come into the school and classroom have been very successful.

Although the challenges in teacher-community collaboration have lessened, we seem to have reached a standstill. Community members have been instrumental in developing and maintaining the community garden. They have created the hardscape in the garden and have done most of the landscaping. Although some classes do go out to the garden during the school day, community members are often at work during this time and thus do not see teachers in the garden. Community members have also come into the school to assist children with planting and a few other lessons. At this point, community members feel that they have crossed the bridge into the school but the teachers have not crossed the bridge into the community. During almost every workday, community members ask why teachers are not in attendance. Sometimes the principal and the library aide do attend workdays. Even though school staff are in the garden, community members still ask about the teachers.

Community members are interested in children's education and feel that children could learn something from them. For example, one community member feels it is important for children to learn how to plant their seedlings in straight rows and how to collect seeds from plants to use in the next growing season; these are important life lessons. Community members also feel that children and teachers' active involvement in the garden would be beneficial in terms of building relationships and helping to create something dynamic. The community members have a great sense of accomplishment when watching their plants grow over the course of a season and want to share this experience with children and teachers. They feel this can be an important part of children's education.

Beyond the already-discussed challenges that teachers face are the societal-level challenges to using a project-based approach. This approach requires that students and the teacher learn together and that all classroom members have knowledge to contribute. This

assumption means that students must be able to talk and interact with one another. This kind of classroom is based on a paradigm that is different from the way many teachers are trained and what much of society expects classrooms to look like. This kind of approach, especially when used with low-income and African American students, may bring with it a teacher concern that she will be perceived as not being in control of her classroom, or that her classroom is chaotic. A teacher who feels disempowered and unsupported is unlikely to take risks that may lead to the label of *bad teacher.* Indeed, Dewey (1916) argued that teachers are limited in their classroom vision by district administrators and so find it difficult to provide vision to their students. Counts (1932) maintained that teacher power is only as great as their societal power. Finally, Foucault (1978) drew a parallel between schools and the panopticon. The fact that schools have so many windows and open-door policies serves to keep both students and teachers visible at all times. Outsiders are able to view school staff and classrooms at most any time. This level of visibility serves as a constant reminder to teachers that they must behave as they perceive they are expected to behave.

In short, the way the garden is currently being used follows a model of cooperation rather than collaboration. Teachers use the garden during the day and rely on the community members to maintain the space. Community members use the garden in the evening and come into the school when asked. A collaborative model would be one where community members are in the school and garden during the day *and* teachers are in the garden (and thus, the community) in the evenings. Teachers, students, and community members would work together, face to face, in making determinations about the garden. Each group would have a voice in what happens and how it happens. A community would develop in which there was a strong support network, and resources were shared among members. Each group would feel as if they were giving and receiving assistance and support.

With respect to Trickett's (1997) model and Keith and Keith's (1996) model of assessing classroom-community collaboration, the garden seems to be meeting some of the goals. Both models

begin with an assessment, or finding the strengths of the residents in the neighborhood. Partners for Progress did an informal assessment of the surrounding neighborhoods and learned that there were many community members with beautiful flower and vegetable gardens. We also examined the migration patterns to this area of town and found that many families had roots in the South and family farms. Finally, we learned that the neighborhood was composed of many children and elderly residents, and we hoped that the older residents would be more flexible with their schedules and would be able to work with the children.

The second milestone for assessing the classroom-community collaboration is to build a collaborative style, or strengthen the social networks of those involved. This step has been partially fulfilled. Two women from the Brighton Park Neighborhood Association were hired as lunchroom aides. A fair number of children at the school now see two familiar faces in the lunchroom every day. In addition, these two now know more about what is happening at the school and share this information with others in their neighborhood. Additionally, teachers now know more community members than they had previously known, and community members now know more teachers. Teachers have contacted community members to ask them to come into the classroom, but teachers and community members working side by side, on equal ground, has been slow to materialize. It is to be hoped that these small wins will serve as a catalyst so that teachers and community members work in more collaborative ways.

Trickett (1997) noted that another important step in building a classroom-community collaboration is that the collaboration must be mutually empowering and built into the system. The 2000-2001 school year marked Woodson's first official year as a project-based learning school. This step should help facilitate the embeddedness of the community garden into the classroom for teachers and students who choose to use the garden as a focus for project-based learning. Many teachers have shown this interest and are considering multiple projects for their classrooms. The projects range in their relations to general school curriculum with respect to history (researching the U.S. Department of Agriculture settlement with

African American farmers), science (studying the effects of different colors of lights on plants, researching genetically modified organisms), math (measuring plants and their growth), and the language arts (putting together a newsletter). There is a moment of opportunity to build community members into the curriculum (e.g., as sources of funds of knowledge; Moll, 1997), and, as a community psychologist, the first author has advocated just this point.

Finally, Keith and Keith (1996) argued that a successful classroom-community collaboration should expand education and training opportunities into the community that are accessible for community members and students. Community members have come into the school when guest speakers have come to talk about composting and other matters, but formal opportunities have not yet expanded into the community. Informally, the Brighton Park Neighborhood Association members often teach children about plants when they work in the garden together in the evenings. Formally, the library aide has had multiple conversations with the university's cooperative extension office to make the community garden a master gardener site[2]. One community member is interested in this possibility because she would like to receive this training and use the community garden as a place to fulfill her volunteer hours. If the community garden were a master gardener site, community members could learn more about the latest gardening techniques and could be certified as master gardeners.

CONCLUSION

The Lincoln-Woodson community garden has served as a location and project to facilitate school-community relations and culturally relevant project-based learning. Although the in-class projects have not yet reached their full potential, they have, nevertheless, provided wins for teachers, students, and community members. Teachers have been willing to try new things and they have invited community members into their classrooms. Community members have accepted teacher invitations to come into the school. Community members have invited teachers into the garden on weekends and evenings, but teachers have been less enthusiastic

about getting involved in community activities. This current challenge of making the bridge between school and community a two-way rather than one-way avenue has slowed the process of building mutually empowering collaboration styles, strengthening networks between community members and teachers, and creating learning opportunities in the community for all residents.

The community garden can serve as an ideal theme for project-based learning in the school. The current efforts to introduce a project-based curriculum serve as a moment of opportunity to bolster and strengthen the relationship between teachers and community members by working the relationships and culturally relevant themes into the project-based learning approach. Based on Partner's assessment of the neighborhood surrounding the school, and children's reactions to past garden-classroom discussions, the garden appears to be culturally relevant. As such, it can serve as a common base for children to build from and legitimizes current community knowledge as important for schooling. Additionally, there is a wealth of knowledge and resources in the surrounding community, another important aspect for choosing a theme in project-based learning. As a group, Partners continues to encourage teachers to cross the bridge into the community so that they can come to know the people and resources that have made an important learning tool, the community garden, a reality.

NOTES

1. All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

2. The master gardening program is run through the university's cooperative extension office and is a class that community members can take to learn more about gardening techniques. If the community member takes the class and does 70 hours of volunteer work, he or she can be certified as a master gardener.

REFERENCES

Alexander, K. L., & Entwisle, D. R. (1988). Achievement in the first two years of school: Patterns and processes. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *53*.

Apple, M. W. (1992). Education, culture, and class power: Basil Bernstein and the Neo-Marxist sociology of education. *Educational Theory*, *42*, 127-145.

Apple, M. W. (1996). Power, meaning and identity: Critical sociology of education in the United States. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *17*, 125-144.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Counts, G. S. (1932). *Dare the school build a new social order?* New York: John Day.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: Norton.

Desimone, L., Finn-Stevenson, M., & Henrich, C. (2000). Whole school reform in a low-income African American community: The effects of the CoZi model on teachers, parents, and students. *Urban Education*, *35*, 269-323.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

Foucault, M. (1978). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Random House.

Good, T. L., Wiley, A., Thomas, R. E., Stewart, E., McCoy, J., Kloos, B., et al. (1997). Bridging the gap between schools and community: Organizing for family involvement in a low-income neighborhood. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *8*, 277-296.

Hampton, F. M., Mumford, D. A., & Bond, L. (2000). Parent involvement in inner-city schools: The project FAST extended family approach to success. *Urban Education*, *33*, 410-427.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Katz, L. G. (1994, April). *The project approach: ERIC digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (BBB16656).

Katz, L. G., & Chard, S. C. (1998, October). *Issues in selecting topics for projects: ERIC digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (BBB34257).

Keith, N. W., & Keith, N. Z. (1996). Schools as agents of social change: School-based barter for school and community development. In C. E. Stout (Ed.), *The integration of psychology principles in policy development* (pp. 197-227). Westport, CT: Prager.

Kilpatrick, W. H. (1932). *Education and the social crisis: A proposed program*. New York: Liveright.

Moll, L. C. (1997). The creation of mediating settings. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: An International Journal*, *4*, 191-199.

Ogbu, J. (1991). Minority coping responses and school experience. *Journal of Psychohistory*, *18*, 433-456.

Ogbu, J. (1997). Understanding the school performance of urban Blacks: Some essential background knowledge. In H. J. Walberg & O. Reyes (Eds.), *Children and youth: Interdisciplinary perspectives. Issues in children's and families' lives* (Vol. 7, pp. 190-222). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

O'Hearn, T. C., & Gatz, M. (1996). The educational pyramid: A model for community intervention. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, *5*, 127-134.

Rappaport, J., & Moore, T. (Co-chairs). (1999, June). *Building bridges in a majority African American neighborhood using school consultation and community collaboration. Can these strategies coexist?* Symposium conducted at the 7th Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, New Haven, CT.

Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sarason, S. B. (1995). *Parental involvement and the political principle: Why the existing governance structure of schools should be abolished*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Seidman, E., & Rappaport, J. (1974). The educational pyramid: A paradigm for training, research and manpower utilization in community psychology. *American Journal of Community psychology*, *2*, 119-130.

Starnes, B. A. (1999). *The Foxfire approach to teaching and learning: John Dewey, experiential learning, and the core practices* (ERIC digest). ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (EDO-RC-98-6).

Starnes, B. A., Paris, C., & Stevens, C. (1999). *The Foxfire core practices: Discussions and implications*. Mountain City, GA: Foxfire.

Trickett, E. J. (1997). Developing an ecological mind-set on school-community collaboration. In J. L. Schwartz & W. E. Martin Jr. (Eds.), *Applied ecological psychology for schools within communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Wigginton, E. (1989). Foxfire grows up. *Harvard Educational Review*, *59*, 24-49.