Building Castles Together

A sustainable collaboration as a perpetual work-in-progress

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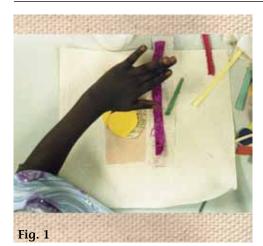**Robert Baskett**
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Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Khadija, a three-year-old Somali girl, regards the artist quizzically – she is unsure how to respond to the suggestion that she 'use the materials to make something that describes family' (Figure 1). Khadija's mother, by contrast, jumps right in, rendering the coloured paper (Figure 2). Later, the artist weaves their work into the fabric panel coloured by Khadija's teacher (Figure 3). This panel and others form the vibrant backdrop of a community celebration, rich with multicultural food, dance, art and music (Figure 4).

This is the Building Castles Together project (BCT), an interdisciplinary collaborative project that draws on art and

cultural communication to strengthen relationships, enhance clinical services and build community. The synthesis of Khadija's, her mother's and her teacher's creations into an integrated exhibit reflect the work of the BCT partnership (Figures 1–5). Each participant contributes their pieces which, when woven together, interact together more substantially. The innovation of one empowers the participation of another who may have been otherwise unable to join in.

The BCT project and the collaborative partnership from which it was born are the focus of this article. The partnership, located in the state of Maine in the United States, is between the community-based campus of the University of Southern Maine at Lewiston-Auburn College (USM LAC) and an early education centre, Sandcastle Clinical and Educational Services (Sandcastle), serving a diverse range of differently-abled young children. USM LAC is a public state university, one of the degree-awarding institutions of higher education which are funded and operated by the individual states of the USA. They are referred to as 'public' because of the 'influx of public money' subsidising tuition and because they are generally open to the public to apply for admission (Peterson's 2011).

This complex 10-year partnership recently reached a high point in its development with the independently funded BCT project (through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation). BCT is an ideal model for analysis of sustainable university-community partnerships as it manifests complexities inherent in such collaborations: the factors which have made it most successful and sustainable are also those that have presented the greatest challenges.

This article, co-authored by Sandcastle and USM LAC, focuses on five elements of our collaboration: (1) mutuality and reciprocity; (2) diversity and interdisciplinarity; (3) community integration; (4) dynamic interaction; and (5) asset enhancement. Hart and Wolff (2006) note the dearth of scholarship reflecting full community partner participation. We respond to this concern by framing our discussion through the shared voice of the BCT partners' collaborative (the 'we' of the article), complemented by the unique perspectives of each partner. We also posit why community partners are under-represented in the academic literature and how this challenge is reflected in this assessment of the partnership's sustainability.

THE PARTNERS

Community-engagement activists emphasise that, fundamental to ideals of social justice, university-community partnerships ought to derive from genuine community need, not academic fiat (Porter & Monard 2001; Reardon 2006). Our partnership was established because of the practical need to better integrate all members of our community, most recently including a burgeoning population of Somali immigrants. There was also recognition that Lewiston,

Maine, the setting of our partnership, experiences adversity at many levels, impacting the most vulnerable – children, the poor and recent immigrants (Vazquez Jacobus & Baskett 2010; Vazquez Jacobus & Harris 2007). Child poverty in Androscoggin County's principal cities, Lewiston and Auburn, is respectively 42 per cent and 27 per cent of the child population (Maine Children's Alliance 2010). The challenges are seen vividly in the local public schools. In 2009, 50.5 per cent of children in Androscoggin County qualified for free lunch and 18 per cent of Androscoggin's K–12 students required special education (Maine Children's Alliance 2010). At the school serving the downtown Lewiston area, which has the highest concentration of immigrants in the city, 97 per cent of the children receive free lunch (Maine Department of Education 2010). Recent restrictions in public spending multiply these hardships.

On top of these challenges, the community's cultural landscape has rapidly become more diverse. Since 2001, approximately 5000 East African immigrants have relocated to Lewiston–Auburn (Vazquez Jacobus & Jalali in press), an area with little recent experience with multicultural populations. In fall 2001, there were only 23 students who came from non-English-speaking families in Lewiston's public schools; by fall 2010, the number was over 1000 (Vazquez Jacobus & Jalali in press). As a microcosm of the Lewiston–Auburn area, the demographics of Sandcastle have also changed dramatically. Initially the families served were almost entirely Caucasian and predominantly of Franco-American descent. However, between 2003 and 2008 Sandcastle's proportion of children of colour doubled. Many of these children are 'New Americans', representing Somalia, Kenya, the Sudan, Morocco, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Latin America.

Concerned about these social issues, Sandcastle approached USM LAC hoping to join forces to ameliorate the complex challenges confronted by their families. Sandcastle's mission is to provide early childhood education and clinical services to children with special needs and to typically developing children, as well as support services to their families. The agency is unique in the region in its efforts to provide inclusion programming for children both with and without disabilities. Most of the children attending Sandcastle (aged 18 months to 5 years) have been diagnosed with a developmental disability; most come from low-income families; half come from immigrant families (80 per cent of these are East African immigrants who have experienced the trauma of war, loss, refugee camps and relocation); over half live in single-parent households; two-thirds have experienced crisis; and most of Sandcastle's children experience many of these risk factors.

As the community-based campus of the state university, USM LAC confronts many of the same challenges as Sandcastle. Founded in 1988 in response to low educational attainment in the region, USM LAC has developed to meet the needs of its

community (Vazquez Jacobus, Tiemann & Reed in press). USM LAC serves approximately 1250 students, all commuters, who are 'non-traditional' in age (average age is 30) and life experience. Most USM LAC students are first-generation college students, 75 per cent are female, nearly all are economically challenged (over 90 per cent receive financial assistance to attend school), most work full time and many are parents. Paramount to USM LAC's mission is that the curriculum is relevant to the lives of its students and to their needs in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the community (Vazquez Jacobus & Baskett 2010, pp. 94–95).

THE BUILDING CASTLES TOGETHER PROJECT

Although engaged learning has always been integral to the mission and pedagogy of USM LAC, there has yet to be sustained institutional support for this work: there is no independent budget to sustain community service learning at USM LAC and no institutionally dedicated staff. Understanding this, and hoping to support USM LAC's community-engagement work, in 2008 representatives from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Kellogg) proposed a discretionary grant of $25 500 to support a common focus: vulnerable children.

The USM LAC faculty member who coordinated community service learning (the Coordinator) convened a project leadership team that included Sandcastle's psychologist/director; a Somali cultural consultant and USM LAC graduate; a USM LAC student who had extensive experience in community engagement; and the Coordinator herself as Project Director. Together, this multicultural and multi-disciplinary leadership team began the work of collaboratively directing the project by co-authoring a proposal to Kellogg and appropriately naming the endeavour 'Building Castles Together'. The BCT project was initially proposed as an open-ended pilot project aimed at developing a general protocol for a holistic, culturally sensitive and egalitarian model for assessment of disabled (particularly immigrant) children and their families. BCT was also designed as a community-driven project which would glean its specific goals from the community (Israel et al. 2001).

In its nascent stages through the spring of 2009, the BCT team held community meetings and informal workshops to derive specific actions from interested participants. The project was a timely response to community need because of the confluence of several events. First, we noted the rapidly changing demographics in our region, and that these shifts were leaving the ordinary systems of care wanting for understanding, expertise and cultural knowledge. Second, the concept of higher education was expanding to consider civic engagement and global understanding as critical for full comprehension and development of engaged citizens (Boyer 1996; Reardon 2006; Stanton, Giles & Cruz 1999). Third, given the tensions experienced in the community, we believed that the integration of children and families as partners in their care and

education would empower families, build resilience and contribute to the capacity of the community (Israel et al. 2001; Vazquez Jacobus & Harris 2007).

Originally, co-created art was proposed only as a mechanism for launching ideas about the 'real' work of the project. Thus, at the project's inception, the Coordinator commissioned a public artist to facilitate 'just one or two workshops' designed to elicit ideas and build trust. However, as the project progressed, we came to understand that community co-created art was not just a means but a valuable end in itself. As we crafted the art together we developed an alternate means of communicating and improving our understanding of each other. Thus, fairly early into the BCT timeline, our goal transformed from developing a protocol for culturally sensitive assessment and implementation of early childhood services to developing a multi-level community building program which included the co-creation of a public art work.

After almost a year of planning, the public artist joined our leadership team and BCT began, gently, with integrated workshops exploring culture, communication and creative expression. We built on foundational themes derived from these workshops to hold a few 'art get-togethers', with children, families and staff members co-creating art (Figures 1–3). While the art was being generated, we conversed with interested families about their heritage, their children, their challenges and their strengths. We marked BCT at the inception and again at the conclusion, with large (over 100 in attendance) community celebrations bringing art, music, dance and food together with culture to promote solidarity (Figure 4). We then integrated the narratives, the community gathering process and the co-created art into a comprehensive exhibit of multimedia panels (Figure 5 is an example of one of these). Although the BCT project has formally concluded, in that the designated funding has been exhausted and a final report submitted to the funder, the project is really now in an evaluation, assessment and scholarship phase (as opposed to an action phase), and through the strengthened partnership, many elements of the project are ongoing, as will be discussed further below.

ANALYSIS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Mutuality/Reciprocity

Reflecting on the elements of our partnership that most contribute to sustainability, we begin with mutual regard, reciprocity, trust and balance. Our mutual partnership works because it is founded on common goals (Begun et al. 2010; Merzel et al. 2007): we aspire to a happier and more accessible community, particularly for those most marginalised. We believe that the most effective and just way to achieve these ideals is through public participation which includes the disenfranchised in a process of mutual and sustained empowering exchanges. We hope to model in our shared leadership (Miller 2006; Seers et al. 2003) the strengths-based

mutual regard for each other that we expect will empower the community (Sparks & Muro 2009).

Critical to our dynamic partnership is interest in ongoing learning (Fogel & Cook 2006; Hart & Wolff 2006). We build regular reflection into our process (Merzel et al. 2007; Reardon 2006) and, at the conclusion of each activity, we debrief together, sharing favourite moments and reflecting on lessons learned. This process is vital to sustaining our partnership as it allows us to be mindful of the positive reasons for our collaboration. Our time is so limited and our lives so stressful that without these deliberate reminders of assets, we might revert to questioning the value of so consuming a venture.

From Sandcastle's perspective, mutuality is a prerequisite for an enduring collaboration with the university. A project such as BCT requires the development of trust at a substantial and intricate level. The process is particularly complicated because the fields involved are different from the usual educational and clinical disciplines. In early education, 'art' is referred to most often as a component providing a developing child with an avenue of expression or as a means of curricular boost to emergent literacy and numeracy skills (Phillips et al. 2010). Art as a collective process and as a pervasive element of communication is new. Understanding the novelty requires flexibility and a willingness to suspend goal-directed thinking. This trust has, at times, required extensive conversation, and, frequently, the abandonment of expectation (Fogel & Cook 2006).

Egalitarian interaction has been a cornerstone of Sandcastle sustaining a continuing relationship with USM LAC, which is very different from a series of relationships. It is possible to have periodic relationships of value where one partner holds the reins and the other cordially responds. For instance, a university may use a preschool as a place of recruitment for subjects of research. Sandcastle has participated in such relationships, which have been of value to the University but of little consequence to the agency. Similarly, Sandcastle has engaged faculty in resourcing answers to academic questions or finding specialised items such as computer programs where the benefit was primarily for Sandcastle. In themselves, neither of these interactions would be regarded as mutual or reciprocal.

Mutuality, by contrast, requires the reciprocal recognition of value and expertise. For this to occur, a community partner must be regarded as an equal, not merely a mechanical agent of the university partner. As a community partner, Sandcastle does not always experience this, which may be due to the hierarchical nature of the university itself. For example, a well-intentioned remark that the university could provide the 'brains' to the community partner's 'brawn' reflected, sadly, a familiar bias in the attitude of some academics – that community partners are the feeble-minded, albeit stout, cousins to the intellectual inhabitants of the ivory tower. It also reflected the suspected reality that the equality and mutuality can only go so far. The sustainability of

the BCT partners' current egalitarianism is perhaps only possible at the present scale of a modest non-profit collaborating with a small campus at a local level. It would likely face challenges if the relationship was more ambitious and required more adjustment at foundational levels of the university hierarchy.

The partnership's mutuality and reciprocity is evident in the example of this article. In answer to the call for scholarship fully co-authored by community partners and academics (Hart & Wolff 2006), the BCT partners felt well placed to co-author a piece describing the lessons of our partnership and the obstacles to full co-authorship. The irony is that to accept this charge we needed to overcome those very challenges. In our experience, the lack of non-academic participation in academic scholarship reflects not a disinterest in engagement but a shortage of resources and the different value placed on publication in scholarly journals. In addition to supporting nobler ideals, professors must 'publish or perish'. While an agency leader may have an interest in publication in scholarly journals, a more 'useful' outlet for their scholarship may be an application for funding, an appeal to a local charitable organisation, an editorial in a local paper, or an informal talk at a library. For the university, scholarship may be the end in itself; for the community partner, scholarship is most often a means to a more practical end.

In this difficult economic climate and for those who work with vulnerable populations and are reliant on public funding, the decision to partner is an onerous one, weighed through balancing costs and benefits (Bushouse 2005). Even in our partnership, where our community partners appreciate the requirements of scholarship and the importance of publication for credibility in academia, they have neither the leisure nor the incentive to wax poetic on themes of community engagement – better to spend their limited time engaging with that very community than writing about it. Whatever time a community organisation may have for writing needs be spent authoring grant applications to keep their organisation functioning (Vazquez Jacobus, Tiemann & Reed in press).

This is how the mutuality of a sustainable partnership applies. Recognising the import of scholarship to their academic partner, the BCT community partners rearranged their priorities to co-author this article. Such reallocation is not always feasible, however, and we wonder how other similarly situated partnerships address this call. Just as practitioners of community engagement now understand the paradox of community-engagement work that does not integrally include the community partner (Israel et al. 2001; Reardon 2006), the academy may now realise the irony of *writing* about such mutual collaborations without the full co-authorship of the partners. Where recently there has been a movement towards Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), perhaps now we can hope for the birth of Community Based Participatory Scholarship.

In order for disenfranchised community partners to join the ranks of scholars we may need to alter the paradigm of the Scholarship of Engagement yet again (Boyer 1996; Hart & Wolff 2006; Zlotkowski 2002). Community partner authors ought to be better supported to fully engage in scholarship. This might mean fiscally strapped agencies being supplemented financially (Fielden et al. 2007). Correspondingly, the academic system which perpetuates the imbalance in authorial participation would need to be realigned to expand community-engaged scholarship (Fielden et al. 2007; Hart & Wolff 2006). When academic work that has actual value to community and academic partners alike (co-authoring grants, organising community-building events, co-creating artistic exhibits) is credited by the academy, then university-community partnerships may experience greater reciprocity. Agencies which receive assistance with completing proposals for funding may be more available to co-author more traditional academic articles and papers. Until then, academics run the risk of sustaining themselves through self-referential analyses which perpetuate the very imbalances they are striving to rectify.

Interdisciplinarity/Diversity
The BCT team includes a diverse range of professionals representing different institutional agendas and missions. Contributing to our sustainability is our mutual recognition of the assets each partner brings, as well as appreciation of the vibrant interaction this union of diverse perspectives affords (McCaslin &Barnstable 2008; Porter & Monard 2001). We guide BCT from a shared leadership perspective, each working from our relative strengths. We are fortunate that each of our team members is him/herself multi-disciplinary: the artist and clinician are also academics; the university instructor is also a multicultural clinician. As experienced 'boundary crossers' (Reardon 2006, p. 106), we can speak each others' languages and have a good understanding of each others' institutional constraints and mandates. We also challenge each others' assumptions (Fogel & Cook 2006) and modify our interventions, all the while making our work more accessible to the community.

Complex social challenges require complex multi-level solutions (Downs et al. 2009; Wackerhausen 2009). We aspire to improve the care for, build relationships with, and enhance the engagement of a vulnerable population of disabled children and their families who face multiple challenges. Many of these families are immigrants or refugees, most are poor, and many are living in environments of chaos or have survived trauma. One family involved with BCT includes a mother and father born in Somalia, who met in a refugee camp in the Middle East and emigrated to the southern United States before relocating to Lewiston, Maine, and five children, the youngest of whom has been diagnosed with autism, a condition that neither parent seems to be able to place in a cultural context. The mother lost virtually her entire family to

violence in Somalia, and was herself jailed; the father was forced to work for a militia before escaping during a gun battle. The father speaks limited English and prefers to do so without an interpreter; his wife does not speak fluently and relies on his translation. Understanding this family is not simply a matter of translation: even approaching the subject of interpretation is fraught with hazards because of gender, tribal affiliation and individual experiences. The compounding factors of psychological trauma and developmental disability require a holistic response that must exceed the specialties of individuals: no one field any more than any one person can begin to approach such complexities solo (Vazquez Jacobus & Harris 2007). None of us claims to have all the answers, nor that our field of expertise is the sole avenue for solutions.

We also approach the multiple dimensions of children and families by appealing to their diverse assets. Art, talk, analysis, education, music, dance, food and culture elicit different skills and responses from our participants. Relating through diverse cultures and languages, as well as across ages and abilities, we provide multiple methods of communication and appeal to different learning styles through our varied approaches (Kolb 1984). In addition, the cultural and artistic exchange between professions and across status can reframe the relationship between college student and community member, between teacher and child (Arlach, Sanchez & Feuer 2009).

As it sustains us, our interdisciplinarity also threatens our stability. A common refrain is 'We are taking on too much!' In the spirit of inclusiveness, our projects include music, dance, art, food, socialising, and gathering histories and recipes – all the while trying to integrate all levels of disability, community, students and staff. 'Can we JUST do an art workshop?', a partner queries anxiously. 'No food, no entertainment and we don't invite the whole neighbourhood. Just focus on one thing for once!' Many times we have had to scale back and realise that we can't do it all. With this interdisciplinarity, we have the tendency to overextend ourselves to the point of exhaustion, or to appear chaotic and disorganised. Our conglomerate of multi-disciplinary partners interlaces a fine and complex mesh. This kind of sustainable reciprocal relationship does not come easily and it does not come without cost. We have over our time together worked through rough patches of miscommunication and disaffection. What has seen us through the challenges is a resiliency in the fabric woven by our common ideals.

Community Integration

Our mutuality occurs not only at the level of our interdisciplinary team's interaction, but through our engagement at the macro level of university and community. Community-engagement scholars stress the need to include community partners reciprocally in the service-learning work of universities (Hart & Wolf 2006; Reardon 2006). Indeed, the growing field of CBPR highlights the

import to validity, credibility and sustainability of such mutual relationships (Israel et al. 2001; Merzel et al. 2007). However, even the Empowerment/Capacity Building Partnership (Reardon 2006, p. 97; Shramm & Nye 1999) is university focused and directed. Such partnerships aim to include the community at all levels of planning and implementation, and to maximise the benefit to the community, but they often begin from a skewed orientation – a history of hierarchical 'town and gown' relationships which need be rehabilitated (Fogel & Cook 2006; Reardon 2006). Thus, even when elite colleges strive to identify and measure benefits to the community, many do so in large part to assure themselves that such enrichments exist and, in doing so, demonstrate a mutuality with the community that may not otherwise be apparent.

Among the few benefits of being a financially strained public university is that few community partners are beholden to it. Being of, by and for the community, at USM LAC mutuality with community partners is inherent. BCT is community based because both Sandcastle and USM LAC *are* the community. Our memberships draw from, and serve, the local communities and reflect their increasing diversity as well as their financial and educational challenges. The university and its constituents face the same hardships as the community, and in many cases we are all, quite literally, 'in it together'.

The BCT partnership, in comprising members of the community at multiple levels, transcends the empowerment-based model of more traditional university-community partnerships. We have in our membership the disenfranchised as well as the privileged. There is, however, a tension between the membership of the BCT leadership team and the people represented by our membership. Though culturally diverse and representing multiple perspectives, the members of our leadership team are, comparatively, privileged. This is why it is critical that our partnership not be merely community based, but community derived. We follow strengths-based, client-directed practices of integrating the inherent expertise of our clientele (Sparks & Muro 2009) to bring the families we work with into the direction of the project.

Correspondingly, Sandcastle's relationship with institutions of higher education changes with the degree that an institution is integrated with the community. For instance, with the local private selective college, there is no anticipation that their students will become Sandcastle employees, as their students generally have limited connections to Lewiston and Maine and tend to depart on graduation. However, Sandcastle is always mindful that USM LAC students are likely to be past, present or future clients or employees of Sandcastle. Investment in a sustainable relationship between USM LAC and Sandcastle is important because it is essentially a direct investment in future operations. Sandcastle has several employees who are graduates of USM LAC's programs, and many students of USM LAC use Sandcastle's services.

Community is the unofficially represented partner in the USM LAC–Sandcastle partnership and, as such, most of our programs are open to the community. We introduce sustainable, positive change in the community through the integration of community-based approaches so that the people of Lewiston, as well as the families and staff directly served by BCT, expect to be included. We intended with the BCT project not only to partner the university and the agency, but to engage the community of families with disabled and immigrant children in partnership with the mostly white low-income students of the public university. As a result, we chose not to determine our specific project goals in advance as we needed to derive these from the community as we worked together (Castillo et al. 2005).

To the extent that elements of BCT are sustainable in the local community, it is because we have not made ourselves indispensable. Integral to the project has been the building of communities, assets and networks so that the positive elements of the collaboration could endure long after a discrete project was concluded. In order to be so community based, we have tried to direct the process by consensus, openly and permeably looking for the work of BCT to arise naturally from the community (Arlach, Sanchez & Feuer 2009). This kind of openness, however, can also translate as complicated and undefined. The plasticity can be seen as a lack of clarity, which frustrates some and leaves others unsure of outcomes. For those needing to estimate costs and plan contingencies, such dynamic, organically derived projects can be a challenge to articulate, measure and objectively evaluate.

The story of Oudry, a four-year-old Congolese boy, illustrates BCT's progress with community integration. Oudry is autistic, exceedingly active and largely non-verbal; his family speaks limited English. These challenges, along with complications in translation, led Oudry's family not to attend the BCT opening event, explaining later that they did not think they would be able to keep Oudry under control. Through the course of BCT, Oudry's family shared their stories of living with Oudry, escaping the Congo and of being refugees in Lewiston, a community at best ambivalent about welcoming African refugees. By the time of the BCT culmination celebration, Oudry's family was sure to attend, bringing all their children, including Oudry, to the well-attended event in Lewiston's multipurpose centre. They brought a native Congolese dish to share, they danced to the music and they took pride in their recipes. Oudry was all over the multipurpose centre, bounding about from the art table to the food, and back again. Nevertheless, Oudry's mother had a chance to dance and join in the fun. Wherever Oudry ran, someone would follow: a university student, a Sandcastle teacher, or one of Oudry's sisters: 'hanging out' with Oudry was just one of the activities of the evening. The next day the cover story in the local paper was about the BCT celebration. A colourful picture showed a pack of children laughing

and clapping at the Franco–American musician entertaining them. In the back of the picture is a brown and red blur: Oudry running through the scene.

Dynamic Interaction

Weinberg (2003) cautions that there is 'little flexibility' in community-based research and 'high consequences for failed projects' (p. 26). He notes the challenges presented by rigid academic schedules and student learning-outcome requirements, emphasising the need to negotiate over multiple levels and develop common principles for governing partnerships. Working across so many organisations, cultures and personalities, the BCT team recognised the need to eschew inflexibility from the beginning. Though more cumbersome to initiate and more complicated to operationalise, our activities are carried out flexibly, with multiple sources of input. The diverse experiences of our members create a dynamic union which evolves to respond to the changing needs of our community.

We begin with a general plan as scaffolding, and then arrange from the back forwards, starting with a set date or output about which we must be concrete and objective (a grant report or a large community event) and then work our way backwards, with each partner setting a work plan for participation which will allow us to achieve the common end. When, inevitably, someone misses a meeting or an art instalment is held up, we find a substitute if necessary or rework that piece rather than abandon the entire affair. Many of us have had to relax some of our previous rigidities in order to work well together: the academic must tolerate a range of different methods of written input; the artist must be open to an aesthetic which includes inexpert contributions; the preschool teacher must abandon a learning plan and incorporate a spontaneous activity.

This flexibility, and our mutual compact to abide by it, is one of the partnership's most powerful assets as it makes us not only adaptable, but current and resilient in the face of challenge (Vazquez Jacobus & Harris 2007). The fluidity often allows us to fill in gaps or to double-up in areas experiencing disproportionate wear. For instance, when it became clear that many families enthusiastically participated in art workshops in a way that they did not in spoken interviews, we reallocated our resources to host more art workshops. However, like children upset that all the crayons are at the other side of the table, the tension created when the resources of a project were disproportionately aligned is not to be denied.

Similarly, though we were fortunate that our funder was amenable to keeping final outputs open, such flexibility is rare. Many need clear structure and concrete objectives in order to best function. Most institutions require specific, objectively measurable proposals, plans and budgets to be submitted well in advance. Modifications of contract, budgets and timelines can add a great deal of stress to institutional administrators, as well as create

conflict among team members who are unclear about how to proceed or on what to rely. In a partnership such as ours where the resources are strained at all levels, each project exists hand-to-mouth with the next: the artist cannot work on the wall mural if she is still completing the brochure mock-up. Our flexibility can make it a challenge to plan or participate in other projects, never knowing when we are going to be required for this or that one.

Asset Enhancement

From the perspective of a community organisation, partnering with a university has the potential to amplify resources, but also carries a necessary investment and a degree of risk (Bushouse 2005). Students vary by aptitude, experience and availability. Sandcastle's most common relationship with local institutes of higher education, as a practicum placement site, has generally been positive, with interns providing direct benefit to clinical work and not infrequently resulting in future hiring opportunities. Bushouse (2005) describes the general preference of non-profit organisations for 'transactional' or limited scope of engagement relationships, rather than sustained or 'transformational' associations. Sandcastle has historically preferred such transactional relationships, where the project is circumscribed and distant from the essential functioning of the organisation, as they are 'less risky' and less cumbersome. For instance, a student in information technology can be readily hosted to assist in standardised form development. If the project is timely and successful, both sides benefit, and if the project is not timely, little has been lost.

BCT has introduced Sandcastle to the fraught, but potentially beneficial, world of transformational partnerships. The rewards of investment in the transformational process include the addition of specialties and relationships, as well as the enhanced appreciation of the community partner's own resources. A value of sustained investment in the partnership is the assembly of relationships outside that of the initial partners. Sandcastle's connection with the BCT project has led to surprising additions. For example, the work of the public artist evolved into a Public Sculpture Grant for a work to be situated at Sandcastle.

Like Sandcastle, USM LAC and many of the organisations involved in BCT are working with constrained resources. Yet in the face of these limitations, the BCT collaboration affords our constituencies art, clinical experience, cultural enrichment and enhanced personal attention. There is little question that our students, staff and families are richer for the experience with BCT. However, the asset picture is more complicated for institutional and project personnel. As all the partners in our collaboration are economically stretched, more opportunities also mean even greater stress and work for collaborators. Unless there are sufficient funds through an independent or external source to hire new dedicated staff, additional collaborative projects may mean that already burdened personnel become even more so. Thus, one

of our chief lessons has been to limit goals and expectations to realistic outcomes, given funding, time and personnel limitations (McCaslin & Barnstable 2008).

Paradoxically, it is our limited resources and economic crises that make our partnership most sustainable, as such unions are so instrumental to our institutional survival. Recently, authors have written of the value of collaborative partnerships, especially in trying economic times, to maximise opportunities as well as to enhance resources (Bushouse 2005; McCaslin & Barnstable 2008; Vazquez Jacobus & Baskett 2010; Vazquez Jacobus, Tiemann & Reed in press). Philosophically, BCT has always had buy-in at both the university and the community level to the ideals and values of community partnerships. It is the literal buy-in, the delegation of resources and the priority of assets, which we are missing. Unfortunately, it is this financial buy-in that is also required for our sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Sustainability is not in and of itself an affirmative good. To the extent that detrimental practices or policies are perpetuated, such sustainability can be destructive. Our discussion above summarises the aspects of our partnership that are positive and imitable by other consortiums, as well as cautions against those undesirable outcomes we insidiously maintain. As we look to the seeds of positive sustainability planted through our collaborative partnership, we must continue to ask ourselves critical questions regarding our sustainability.

The first crucial question is whether BCT has resulted in positive change: how do we evaluate the partnership's impact on the community? Because of the dynamic qualities embraced in this project, 'success', corresponding to desirable outcomes, is a challenge to objectively measure. The BCT group has come to evaluate progress by underscoring the multiple divergent effects of the collaboration rather than by paired comparisons of expectations and outcomes. We see success in our process, in the positive ramifications observed in the community and in progress towards the ideal of a thriving diverse community. We see families who were previously reluctant to interact conversing with a teacher; we see over 100 community members enthusiastically dancing, sharing food and culture; and we see success. As relationship-strengthening and community-building themselves were among our primary goals, we measure our success largely by the interest of our community members in participating and their continuing eagerness to interact. Positive outcomes also include the improved sustainability of these relationships and the capacity-building of our partner organisations. To the extent that we are able to note asset enhancement, strengthened community bonds, improved learning and expanded understanding, we measure sustainability and success.

Our second question is whether these successes are sustainable. With regard to the five tenets of sustainability which we outline in this article, we find some areas more tenable than others. *Mutuality and reciprocity* are tested by the divergent priorities and agendas of community partners and academic institutions, particularly with regard to requirements for formal academic scholarship. However, our *interdisciplinarity and diversity*, the varied skills and resources afforded by the partnership, allow us to focus continuing work on capacities developed through the partnership. For example, Sandcastle now integrates an appreciation of art and culture both in the curriculum and in the school's environment. USM LAC students who participated in the project are reinvigorating a culture of mutuality and culturally infused relationship-building in their work with communities. *Community integration* has been one of the most sustainable elements fostered through BCT as participants have developed stronger and more consistent relationships through the many community celebrations, workshops and interactive opportunities.

Recognition of the realities of *dynamic interaction* between collaborators is perhaps the most lasting lesson of this collaboration. Like any relationship, a collaborative partnership, particularly one which is hoped to be sustained over a long term, ebbs and flows. At one point it may be particularly intense and enthusiastically maintained; at other points one partner may be exhausted, expending disproportionate energy. Occasionally, when institutional resources are too limited to extend outreach to others, the collaboration needs to nurture the patience and foresight to endure a dry spell. It is our belief that a sustainable collaboration includes partners who are flexible enough to moderate their roles as circumstances warrant, resilient enough to withstand challenges without viewing them as damning, and faithful enough to have the perspective to weather tough storms. Indeed, the most sustainable partnerships are those which have endured substantial obstacles and have gleaned invaluable insight into their workings from the challenge.

One of the undeniable factors that assist in the weathering of storms, however, is adequate resources. As we assess the *asset enhancement* afforded through BCT, we face an ironic challenge: collaborations are particularly vital for less well-resourced institutions to enhance their assets. However, as much as these collaborations present more opportunities for our clientele, they also create more stress for our already strapped personnel and resources. Having fewer resources can also mean having fewer options if something goes wrong. It is crucial to sustainability that, not just the partners, but their home institutions have the support and perspective to adapt to changes in the collaboration.

We must also consider that, if our intent is to derive goals and purpose from the community, we need be adaptive to their evolving needs. However, as previously marginalised people are integrated and a model of mutual leadership develops, opinions

and directions present themselves that may not have been present at the project's inception. If the goals are, as ours have been, to integrate these multiple voices, then the project must be flexible enough to integrate this participation without reverting to chaos. Our partnership evolved into the multi-dimensional collaboration that it has become because of our willingness to wrestle through these changes.

It is our belief that paramount to positive sustainability is transparency and flexibility: the very elements which arguably create the greatest challenges. Not all collaborations work, and even those that work well rarely function in every regard. The true labour of a collaboration is having enough time, resources, trust, flexibility and passion so that partners can maximise the assets that work well and be amenable to changing those that don't. Thus, an effective and sustainable collaboration is, by necessity, a perpetual work-in-progress, continually evolving in response to community changes and experiences.

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