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The Seedling Project: A Case Study

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THE SEEDLING PROJECT: A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Lisa McCann

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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ii

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
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This qualitative case study reports findings on the experiences and outcomes perceived by participants of the Seedling Project, a service learning project and grassroots coalition in Indiana, Pennsylvania. In the Seedling Project, students work with community partners to provide food pantry patrons with seedlings and supplies to grow their own food. Participants include members of the Indiana community and students who participated for their service learning experiences in their Sociology of Family course at IUP.

This study used data collected from 12 one-on-one interviews with participants of the Seedling Project; they include clients, students, project planners, and directors of community organizations who collaborated with the Seedling Project. Additional information was gathered through review of documents and websites of community organizations, and a syllabus for the Sociology of Family course at IUP.

The findings of this study could be useful for other organizations and college professors who may want to develop a similar project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Imagine that today is payday and you are at the supermarket, shopping for a week's worth of groceries for your family. Imagine further that you do not have enough money to buy seven days' worth of nutritious food for all family members. Even if you replace some of the healthier, more costly food items in your shopping cart with cheaper, less healthy options, you will still only have enough money to purchase food to last for four days. You think about your young child and your spouse as you reassess the contents in your shopping cart. Only four days' worth of food. What will you do? How will you get enough food to feed your family?

Food insecurity is a stressful, demoralizing predicament of inconsistent food supply that sometimes worsens and leads to hunger. The USDA (2014) defines food insecurity as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food." People who struggle with food insecurity often live in poverty (DeMartini, et al., 2013; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Nord & Prell, 2011). They are faced with difficult decisions such as choosing between paying the bills or putting food on the table. More than 17 million Americans (14 percent) throughout the U.S. lived in food-insecure households in 2014 (USDA, 2014). In 2015, more than 11,900 Indiana County residents (14 percent) lived in food-insecure households (Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, 2016). Local foodscapes such as community gardens can address food insecurity by providing places for people to grow their own food, access gardening expertise, and expanding their social network.

Community Gardens

A community garden is any piece of land that is gardened by a group of people. They are publicly functioning spaces, and most of them generate a multitude of gardening and social activities. Cultural knowledge can be shared and preserved through practicing culture-specific gardening techniques and by growing ethnic foods in garden plots (L'Annunziata, 2010; Lawson, 2005; Minkoff-Zern, 2012). Community gardens often host events like food harvesting and cooking demonstrations. They are hubs for social activities and they serve as platforms for connecting with community members and increasing social ties. Moreover, the research literature indicates that improving one's social connections is likely to improve household food security (Dean & Sharkey, 2011; Martin, Rogers, Cook, & Joseph, 2004).

In community gardens, families and individuals can rent garden plots and save money on their grocery bills by growing food themselves. For example, Patel (1991) calculated that an average garden plot in Newark, New Jersey produced $500 worth of food from a $25 investment of seeds and supplies. As another example, hundreds of community gardens participate in the Plant a Row for the Hungry campaign by the Garden Writers Association. Through this initiative, gardeners plant one extra row in their garden and donate the resulting produce to local food pantries or soup kitchens (gardenwriters.org, 2016).

Numerous studies confirm that community gardens can improve food access and food security. Wither and Burns' study (2013) found that food security improved for residents who participated in a community garden and its food literacy programs. Other studies produced similar findings (Carney et al., 2012; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). However, a study by Loopstra and Tarasuk (2013) suggests that community garden food

2

programs may be ineffective routes to improving food access for food insecure families because of time and distance constraints, or because they did not know how to get involved.

The Seedling Project

The Seedling Project aids low-income residents in Indiana County by providing them with the means to grow and produce their own food at home. However, it also provides students with opportunities to learn about food insecurity and poverty at a local level, as it is a service-learning project for students in Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course. In Dr. Swauger's course, students learn how social inequality, poverty, and social policy affect families. Outside of the classroom, they engage with the community through service work. They meet and learn the stories of impoverished people who work hard to keep their families afloat. Students and community partners work together to gather seedlings and supplies, and they help clients choose plants and seeds during the seedling distribution events.

My thesis is a qualitative case study of the Seedling Project. My research focuses on the experiences and outcomes perceived by members of the Indiana community who participated in the Seedling Project, as well as the experiences and outcomes perceived by students who participated as part of their service learning experiences for their Sociology of Family course at IUP. My main research questions are: What outcomes do community partners perceive from participating in the Seedling Project? What outcomes do IUP services learning students perceive from participating in the Seedling Project?

Using a constructionist paradigm, my study seeks to learn about the experiences of the participants and the outcomes that they perceive. It will investigate the ways and extent to which the Seedling Project achieved its objectives, which are 1) to provide low-income persons with the means needed to grow their own food, and 2) to provide an opportunity for students to gain a

3

greater understanding of food insecurity through service learning experiences with community members and patrons of a local food pantry. My study could aid in improving and expanding the program to service more families in Indiana County. It could serve as a reference for other organizations that may be considering startup of similar gardening programs to address food insecurity in their communities. My study could also aid academic professors and program directors who might want to implement a similar service learning program.

Every spring since 2014, the Seedling Project has offered seedlings and gardening supplies at no cost to low-income residents of Indiana County, and has provided service learning opportunities for college students. Projects like the Seedling Project are important because they may mitigate food insecurity, and they may potentially provide physical and psychological benefits for clients, students, and volunteers. Moreover, service learning offers opportunities for students to understand the consequences of social inequality and poverty through a commodity that everyone can personally relate to: food (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013; Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008; Priest, Bauer, & Fine, 2015). Numerous studies discuss positive outcomes of community-based garden projects and service learning (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013; Bahng, 2015; De Welde, 2015; Grossman et al., 2012). However, there seems to be fewer studies that discuss outcomes of these kinds of projects for both students and community partners. To date, no studies have been conducted on the Seedling Project that examine the experiences of its participants or outcomes for the community. My study contributes to this limited area of research through analysis of individuals' perceived outcomes that stem from their participation in the Seedling Project.

Organization of Thesis

My study is organized into six chapters. The first introductory chapter is the present chapter; it explains the purpose of my study and why this study is important. Chapter Two contains a review of literature that is relevant to my study. Main segments of the literature review include food insecurity, gardening as a response to food insecurity, and service learning. In Chapter Three, I explain in detail all of the methods that I used to conduct my research. I discuss the strata of my sample, and provide my reasons for the recruitment techniques I employed. I describe the interview process, and the steps I took to preserve subject anonymity and safeguard the data. I explain my process for analyzing the data. I also provide an assurance of quality and discuss my positionality as a researcher. In Chapter Four, I provide a description of the Seedling Project, including a description of each of the stakeholders of the project. They include the Sociology of Family course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Indiana County Community Action Program, Zion food pantry, and Chevy Chase Community Center.

Chapter Five contains the findings of my research, and is divided into two sections. In the first section, I discuss my findings regarding student outcomes; in the subsequent section, I discuss my findings on outcomes for the Indiana community. Chapter Six is where I discuss the implications of the findings that I presented in Chapter Five. I identify limitations of my study, and discuss the transferability of my study. I make suggestions for future avenues of research that expand on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contents of Literature Review

My thesis is a qualitative case study of the Seedling Project. As mentioned earlier, it examines the Seedling Project's effects on the local community and the students who participated in it as volunteers. To ground my work in the literature, I review relevant works that pertain to this study. My literature review first addresses food insecurity and its effects on Indiana County, Pennsylvania. I then provide a historical background on local and national food production initiatives that alleviated food insecurity. History demonstrates that regardless of wide variances in points of time, geographic locations, and participating social groups, gardening programs consistently alleviated food insecurity. Next, I review literature pertaining to contemporary, community-based gardening programs whose goals are similar to the Seedling Project, that is, to improve household food security and access to fresh food. I included this important section to illustrate that gardening programs are equally practical today at addressing food security and hunger as they were in the past.

My literature review then turns to service learning: theory, reflection, and finally, to service learning projects. John Dewey's conceptualization of experiential learning (service learning) and reflection is valuable for understanding how this type of pedagogy, particularly through reflection, facilitates rich learning experiences and deep understanding of the issues under study. Reflection is a key element of experiential learning; it links one's service experiences to concepts and facts learned in the classroom. My review includes studies of service learning projects pertaining to food insecurity as examples to explain how service learning is well suited for understanding causes of social problems like food insecurity.

The students who engaged in experiential learning through the Seedling Project did so to understand how social forces within the U.S. affect contemporary American families. Therefore, I do not include literature about service learning projects that take place outside of the United States. Furthermore, I do not include literature about projects that describe volunteer efforts, as that dimension of civic-minded activity has goals that differ from service learning. Volunteerism is geared toward meeting the needs of the community partner, and credit is given only for the number of hours that an individual works. In service learning, students earn credit for learning and understanding concepts.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a persistent, widespread problem in the United States, and it often results in hunger (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2014). According to Feeding America (2016), "48.1 million Americans lived in food-insecure households" in 2014 (feedingamerica.org, 2016). The USDA (2014) defines food insecurity as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food." Food insecurity is associated with numerous physical and mental health problems for people of all ages (Hampton, 2007). The literature shows that people who live in food insecure households are more likely to become obese (Mooney, Must, & Gorman, 2012; Troy, Miller, & Olson, 2011), develop cardiovascular diseases and diabetes mellitus (Seligman, Bindman, Vittinghoff, Kanaya, & Kushel, 2007; Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010), suffer depression (Hadley & Patil, 2008; Zekeri, 2010), and become sick more often (Weigel, Armijos, Hall, Ramirez, & Orozco, 2007). Food insecurity is also closely correlated with unemployment and poverty (DeMartini, et al., 2013; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Nord and Prell, 2011; Ruel, Garrett, Hawkes, & Cohen, 2010).

7

Food insecurity affects residents of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. In 2014, more than 12,500 Indiana County residents lived in food-insecure households (Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, 2015). Sixty-five percent of residents lived on incomes that were either at or below 160% of the poverty threshold, making them eligible for some form of nutritional assistance such as SNAP (the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), WIC (Women, Infants, & Children program), and the free school lunch program (feedingamerica.org, 2016). The USDA recognizes three census tracts in Indiana County as food deserts (USDA, 2015). Within areas designated as food deserts, either the median family income is at or below 80% of the regional family income or the poverty rate is 20% or higher, and families have low or no access to supermarkets. The small food stores located in food deserts seldom offer fresh produce, and if they do, it is usually poor quality and quite expensive. Impoverished families who reside in food deserts or utilize food pantries, or both, have little or no access to fresh produce and nutritional food. Like most national food banks, those in Indiana do not have the storage facilities needed for receiving and storing fresh produce. Instead, they stock their pantries with processed food products because these foods have a long shelf life and do not require expensive refrigeration to store them.

History of Gardening in Response to Food Insecurity

For more than one hundred years, gardens provided solutions to the problem of food insecurity. During the 1890s, a sharp economic downturn forced thousands of immigrant laborers out of work. Hazen Pingree, Detroit's mayor at that time, devised and implemented a social program that allowed unemployed and poor people to grow their own food in the city's many vacant lots. Two-thirds of the foodstuffs produced were potatoes, but varieties of other vegetables were grown as well: beans, beets, carrots, corn, squash, and more. In the program's

first year, 974 families grew $14,000 worth of crops. Today, that same sum would equal more than $200,000 (dollartimes, n.d.). The garden program quickly became known as Pingree's Potato Patches. By 1897, 1,563 families were growing foods in the garden spaces. Some families were able to grow surplus crops, and they sold them at a profit. Pingree's garden program was so successful at alleviating food insecurity in Detroit that within a few years, cities in other states launched similar gardening programs (Lawson, 2005).

During the First World War, America shipped thousands of tons of food overseas to provide food to both American troops and war-torn Europe. The prolonged export of foods caused domestic food shortages and inflated food prices in the United States. Liberty Gardens became a nationwide response to these wartime challenges to national food security. Liberty Gardens were implemented in schools and other public spaces, and at home (Lawson, 2005). Over five million garden plots alleviated food insecurity by producing more than 528 million pounds of produce (sidewalksprouts.com, n.d.). The war ended in 1919, but gardening continued to be a popular activity. In the 1940s, wartime activities of World War II brought about food shortages and rationing. Once again, a scarcity of food stimulated national interest in gardening. This time, federal and state governments promoted the Victory Gardens campaign to encourage citizens to grow their own food, thereby easing strains on the national food supply. Victory Gardens demonstrated solidarity and national pride, but more importantly, they also alleviated food shortages that were caused by wartime demands for food staples. At one point, more than 20 million Victory Gardens supplied 40 percent of the nation's fresh food supply, proving that gardening was a viable option in improving access to fresh food (Lawson, 2005).

More recently in the 1990s, Cuba faced severe nationwide food insecurity, brought about by a tightened U.S. trade embargo and broken trade relations with Russia. However, within ten

years, the country eradicated the food supply crisis through its national promotion of smallholder farming operations and urban vegetable gardens (Companioni, Hernandez, Paez, & Murphy, 2002; Endres & Endres, 2009). In 1999, food production from Cuba's urban lots, backyard, and patio gardens reportedly surpassed 800,000 tons of foodstuffs (Funes, García, Bourque, Pérez, Rosset, 2002). Thus, history shows that growing one's own food can provide an effective hedge for food security, especially during financially disruptive periods (Baker, 2003; Carney et. al, 2012; Trinh et al., 2003; Morton, Bitto, Oakland, & Sam, 2008).

Community-Based Gardening Programs

Grassroots, community-based coalitions and organizations that work to address hunger and improve food access are widespread and their numbers are increasing (Grossman et al, 2012; Treuhaft, Hamm, & Litjens, 2009). They use often-overlooked local resources (including human capital and manpower) to accomplish their objectives. For example, the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) in Buffalo, New York uses reclaimed empty urban lots to grow food. It provides access to fresh produce to more than 2,300 households through their farm stand and mobile store. They train and employ disadvantaged youths to grow, market, and distribute the foods. The organization helped form the Buffalo-Erie Food Council, and it hosted the second Buffalo Food Policy Summit (Mass-ave.org, n.d.).

In Kentucky, the Community Farm Alliance organized a farmers market in a marginalized section of West Louisville, creating access to nutritious foods for urban consumers and a new market for small farmers. The Alliance facilitated WIC food demonstrations at the farmers market and aided in the implementation of EBT equipment for vendors at farmers markets (Cfaky.org, 2016). In Pennsylvania, Grow Pittsburgh partners with the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank and other stakeholders in the annual Great Garden Giveaway.

At several distribution sites during the month of May, seeds and locally grown vegetable seedlings are provided free of charge to hundreds of low-income Pittsburgh residents (Growpittsburgh.org, 2012). The Seedling Project, which takes place in Indiana County and is the topic of this study, was inspired by the Great Garden Giveaway.

Just Food of New York "empowers and supports community leaders to advocate for and increase access to healthy, locally-grown food…" (justfood.org, n.d.). They teach gardeners how to share their gardening knowledge with others, and they connect food pantries with sources of fresh, locally grown food. Just Food also conducts food education activities such as cooking classes for food pantry staff and clients.

The Food Project in Massachusetts works with hundreds of teens and thousands of volunteers to farm multiple parcels of land in five communities. The Food Project produces more than 250,000 pounds of food annually, and they donate a sizeable portion of it to local food banks. The organization also collaborates with numerous other local organizations to develop programs that provide training in life skills and professional development, training for youths, and garden-based education. One program in particular is their Build-a-Garden program. The program provides families with their own raised bed garden in addition to seedlings, seeds, and instructional support. In their Farm to Family program, low-income families can purchase fresh produce from The Food Project farms using their SNAP EBT cards. The Food Project hosts numerous gardening and cooking workshops, some of them led by student interns (Thefoodproject.org, n.d.). Similarly, the Bellingham Food Bank in Washington has garden and food programs. For example, the food bank provides low-income families with a small raised-bed garden and mentoring to grow food. They partner with local farmers to procure in-season

fresh produce at low cost or glean vegetables from fields after harvest time to stock their food bank (Bellinghamfoodbank.org, n.d.).

Community-based programs that promote gardening facilitate multiple health and social benefits. The benefits gained through participation in these kinds of gardening initiatives include increased vegetable consumption, increased physical activity, increased knowledge and ability to grow food, and increased social connections (Biru et. al. 2012; Carney et. al, 2012; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). Studies show that stronger social networks are associated with a better quality diet and better health (Dean & Sharkey, 2011; Martin, Rogers, Cook, & Joseph, 2004).

Gardening programs can improve food security for participants, and they foster community development. Another dimension in gardening programs takes place through service learning projects. Service learning involves a partnership between an academic institution and a community agency or organization to provide students opportunities to combine community service with academic learning. Service learning projects that focus on social inequality, particularly as it relates to food inequality, can effectively address food insecurity in the community and foster favorable university-community relationships. In the subsequent section, I will describe service learning projects in greater detail, and I will provide some examples of service learning projects that address food insecurity and hunger.

Service Learning

Service learning is a teaching methodology where learning occurs through service work, classroom learning, and structured reflection, which connect them to academic objectives (Salemstate.edu, 2016). Service learning differs from volunteerism in that a key desired outcome is learning through coursework that connects to experiences, whereas with volunteerism, the

outcomes focus primarily on meeting the needs of the community partner (Verjee, 2010). In service learning, students earn credit for what they learn and understand rather than for their hours of service (Howard, 1993).

Learning through service learning means that students can see in 'real life' the concepts that they learn first in the classroom; they can see the fruits of their community service efforts in tangible ways, and they strengthen their reflexive and reflective skills. In Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, and Miller's study (2015) of students in a social justice service-learning field experience, one student reflected, "It was like living out the articles we were reading" (p. 10). Astin & Sax (1998) found that service learning contributes to a deeper understanding of social problems, increased social self-efficacy (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), and increased sensitivity and respect for diversity (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mooney & Edwards, 2001).

Service Learning Theory

As far back as the early twentieth century, service learning was seen as an effective pedagogy for college students to learn theoretical concepts pertaining to society and to develop citizenship (Mooney, Edwards, 2001). John Dewey, a professor of Philosophy at Columbia University (1938), believed that thinking and experience should go hand in hand to comprise a full education. He criticized traditional academic teaching styles because they focused only on learning within the confines of a classroom. In his book The School and the Community (1900), Dewey argued that schools should develop citizenship in every student by "… saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with instruments of effective self-direction…" (p. 44). The basic tenet of Dewey's idea of a full education was that the combination of knowledge and skills, coupled with opportunities to apply them in real-world experiences with others, and then deep reflection afterward, is what constituted rich learning. Dewey argued that, in addition

to real-life experiences, deep reflection about those experiences is an essential component of rich learning.

Reflection: Linking Classroom and Experiences

Reflexivity and reflection go hand-in-hand as a main tenet of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). Reflexivity is a critical self-examination of how one's own dissonance, assumptions, opinions, and fears are continually shaped by experiences. It is an ongoing process and it requires deep thinking. Reflection also requires deep thought, but it is not a continuous process; it takes place only after experiences (Finley & Gough, 2003). In reflection, time is spent after an experience to extrapolate meanings of the experience to the self (Daudelin, 1996). Service learners (students) need opportunities to think about their own assumptions of social privilege and power, and compare them with what they see and experience in order to develop self-awareness of their own position of privilege (Catlet & Proweller, 2011). Group discussions, reaction papers, and journals are effective pathways to reflect on the service learning experience.

Writing in a journal, or 'journaling', is a particularly effective means for students to explore and write what they are feeling, evaluate their service work, articulate what they observed, and process new perceptions. Citing Goldsmith (1996) and O'Grady (2000), Weisskirch (2003) posits that when reflection is part of the process in both service learning and journaling, students undergo a "synergistic reflective experience, yielding learning in ways not explicitly noted in learning outcomes." He also posits that there are five recurring themes in reflective practice: awareness of improved personal skills, self-discovery, exploration, and career consideration, and learning about community. The process of writing about service learning experiences in a journal channels students' introspection and records their evolving perspectives.

In Bahng's service learning course (2015) where students administered surveys for housing-project residents' rights to have a garden, one student wrote in her journal

> Upon arriving at Mar Vista I was not entirely sure what to expect, but I think in
> the back of my mind I foresaw encountering a group of rebellious teens who
> obviously had done something wrong to deserve a spot at a continuation school.
> Though it was not a conscious thought I saw myself as better than them in some
> way, as if I was the classic White heroine that they needed for guidance. I am not
> proud of such thoughts, but they were slightly present.

Mooney and Edwards (2001) argue that some of the curricular benefits and abilities obtained from service learning are the ability to apply critical thinking, develop key social and intellectual connections, implement abstract concepts, synthesize ideas from class and the real world, and learn civic responsibility. McKinney, Howery, Kain, & Berheide (2004) posit that when students live the experiences, practice reflexivity and reflection, and provide services that the community needs, they gain new insights into how social problems affect real people. Students realize how they can take abstract concepts they learned in the classroom and, through experience and reflection about their community service, and apply them to address and alleviate social problems.

Service Learning Projects

Service learning lends itself well to developing a deeper understanding of food insecurity. As mentioned earlier, it provides opportunities for students to develop experiential knowledge, which gives them a more informed perspective about social problems and an enhanced ability to acknowledge and appreciate perspectives of others (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013). Ross (2011) provides examples of these intellectual developments in his paper on experiential learning at

Unity College in Maine. In Unity College's *Hunger at Home* course, students learned the root causes of hunger, and they examined hunger's effects in their community. They organized and implemented a fundraiser supper for local hunger relief organizations. Students also presented their research and policy recommendations for addressing hunger at the event.

Cross-Cultural Experiences

The ability to interact and work with individuals from diverse backgrounds is a skill that is in great demand in a global society. Cross-cultural experiences help students develop interpersonal skills to work with others; and, it helps them form an appreciation for diverse points of view. Service learning projects provide abundant cross-cultural interactive opportunities for students. In a service learning project of Texas Christian University where students helped build a community garden in an ethnically diverse community, one student said, "I watched firsthand as distanced neighbors became friends and shared ideas on their knowledge of the best way to grow a tomato." Another noted "the gardening experiences really just exposed me to a part of the population that I haven't had much interaction with" (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013). Porter, Summers, Toton, and Aisenstein (2008) argued that

> "Service-learning students can play an important role in outreach campaigns that help determine client eligibility and offer application assistance for public benefits such as food stamps. Such campaigns can deliver significant, measurable benefits to targeted communities, an outcome infrequently evaluated in the service-learning literature."

Transformation

The literature suggests that campus-community partnerships do encourage civic responsibility in students. Some define civic responsibility as a motivation to address and

ameliorate community concerns for the common good. In a cross-institutional service learning project in which students promoted a food stamp enrollment program, Porter, Summers, Toton, and Aisenstein (2008) noted that as students increased their understanding of income inequality and the institutional barriers that confront poor people, they worked to empower their clients and alleviate their shame for having to resort to food stamps. Students no longer saw their work in the food stamp enrollment program as coursework, but instead saw it as an opportunity to help others. One student commented that the experiences screening individuals for food stamps were like "no other experience I've ever had… I felt the potential to help a needy individual was far greater through the Food Stamp Enrollment Campaign than through other food distribution programs."

A study of garden-based service learning by Aftandilian and Dart (2013) found that students developed a sense of accomplishment and felt empowered to apply what they learned to food insecurity issues in other communities. One international student wrote in his journal that his service-learning experience "opened my mind and showed me different ways of helping people…I am going back to Panama and I want to make urban agriculture a way to help Panamanian communities" (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013). Priest, Bauer, and Fine's study of Kansas State University's The Hunger Project (2015) found that after the course ended, students felt empowered and inspired to "take action" (p. 224), and they wanted to continue working with the community partner in addressing food insecurity.

Community Benefits

Tanaka and Mooney (2010) argued that "the politics of food may be particularly amenable to inspiring imaginative new ways to bring university and community members closer together to pursue public scholarship and community engagement." The University of Kentucky

works with local organizations to improve food access in the community. The Lexington Community Food Assessment report, produced and distributed by the University of Kentucky, has been useful for community organizations as a tool to support their programs (Tanaka & Mooney, 2013). In Tanaka and Mooney's study (2013), students' outreach efforts to enroll potential clients in a food stamp program (now known as SNAP) resulted in increased enrollment by 17 percent. Data that students collected, plus recommendations that they made, were instrumental in improving some of the ways in which food stamps were administered. For example, instead of clients traveling to a county assistance office to apply for food stamps in person, those with transportation issues can now opt for applying online through the COMPASS portal. In addition, a call-in center saves clients time and money when they inquire by telephone about their status in a program. Letters and forms were simplified for easier reading by clients (Porter, Summers, Toton, & Eisenstein (2008).

In Aftandilian and Dart's study (2013) of service learning through creating a community garden, students' work resulted in 76 families growing food in garden plots, enabling them to stretch their household food budgets and improve their household food security. The community garden manager attributed successful completion of the garden project directly to the students' efforts.

In the North Site Garden Survey project, findings from student-administered surveys indicated that the majority of residents in the North Side community of Fort Worth wanted a community garden, but not a demonstration garden as was originally proposed by TAFB. Because of students' contributions, a community garden where residents could grow food themselves was constructed. Between 2011 and 2012, the community garden donated1286 pounds of fresh produce to local food pantries (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013). The foods were grown

and given by resident gardeners, in addition to the foods they grew and brought home for their families.

There can be unplanned but positive outcomes to campus-community partnerships. Porter, Summers, Toton, and Eisenstein (2008) argue that "…there are often positive unanticipated consequences from these efforts." Such benefits could include new relationships forged with community partners and community individuals. Tanaka and Mooney (2010) argue that "the politics of food may be particularly amenable to inspiring imaginative new ways to bring university and community members closer together to pursue scholarship and community engagement." Similarly, Aftandilian and Dart (2013) contend that garden-based service-learning projects…offer an effective pedagogical strategy for emphasizing a hands-on, social justice-oriented approach to learning." Stemming from the Lexington food price assessment project, the publication and distribution of the Lexington Community Food Assessment report spurred new opportunities that linked ongoing university projects with compatible community initiatives (Tanaka & Moody, 2010).

The research literature is rife with studies that focus on benefits of gardening in a variety of contexts from community gardens to home gardens (Draper & Freedman, 2010; Lawson, 2005). Most of the literature in this area focuses on the learning outcomes for students in service learning projects. However, one sector of the literature that necessitates more inquiry is research that examines ways in which service learning projects affect community partners and the local residents they serve. Further, unanticipated secondary consequences and benefits for the host communities of service learning projects should be explored. Consequences or challenges that seemed insignificant might stymie negotiations for future collaborative projects between universities and community partners (Wong et al, 2011). Beneficial outcomes that are perceived

as secondary effects of collective endeavors should be explored to determine the conditions that facilitated these offshoots and what potential they might hold for community change.

This case study sought to contribute to the body of literature by determining ways in which students, community members, and the local community were affected in one way or another by the Seedling Project. My research employs a constructionist framework to explore the experiences of the people who participated in the Seedling Project. The true effects of the Seedling Project can be best determined through analysis of the actual experiences and perceptions of the individuals who participated in it or were touched in some way by its activities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

My study is a case study of the Seedling Project. The purpose of this research is to find

out in what ways and to what extent, if any, that students were affected by the Seedling Project;

and for the Indiana community, the ways and to the extent in which the Indiana community was

affected, if at all, by the Seedling Project. The research questions guiding my research are:

What outcomes do community partners perceive from participating in the Seedling Project?

What outcomes do IUP service learning students perceive from participating in the Seedling

Project?

In this chapter, I will describe my research design, followed by my positionality

statement as a researcher. I will discuss the rationale for the research methods that I used, which

are qualitative with a constructionist framework. I will provide information about case studies as

a frame of inquiry. I then discuss my sample design and data collection methods, provide a

rationale for each of these criteria. I then explain the recruitment strategies and the interview

process for each stratum of my sample. I provide a statement about quality assurance in my data

collection and analysis, and conclude this chapter with a brief summary.

Research Design

I used qualitative research methods because they can produce rich details about

experiences and perceptions of a small number of persons (Patton, 2015, p. 257). I use a

constructionist framework of inquiry to examine experiences and opinions of individuals who

were involved in the Seedling Project. Constructionists claim that reality is subjective; it forms

through the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals (Patton, 2014). Each person in this

study lived their own experiences in the Seedling Project that, when coupled with their own

perceptions and past experiences, produced unique outcomes for each person. I want to find out what those outcomes were. The researcher is engaged and active in the study setting, and her/his experiences contribute to the findings of the study along with the experiences of the informants.

My study uses symbolic interactionism, a constructionist framework of inquiry, to discover the meanings that individuals make from their experiences in the Seedling Project. Symbolic interactionism holds that in the physical world, nothing has intrinsic meaning (Kivisto, 2013). Our worlds are constructed by the meanings that we assign to things. A "thing" can be an object, a person, an idea, or a phenomenon; these things hold different meanings for different individuals. For example, a bucket of gardening soil can be interpreted by one person as a heavy container full of filthy, bacteria-laden dirt that makes a mess whenever it comes in contact with anything, and it would likely have no place on that person's patio. However, to another individual, that same bucket of soil could mean that it is a vessel for growing beautiful flowers or tasty tomatoes. For some individuals, soil in a bucket means the difference between gardening in a container and not gardening at all. Bacteria-laden soil might mean fertile soil to these individuals. They may feel fortunate if the soil is loaded with bacteria, because biologically active soil is fertile soil and contributes to robust plants with bigger yields.

Symbolic interactionism is grounded on the social psychology work of George Herbert Mead (Patton, 2015). Herbert Blumer expanded on Mead's ideas by adding a sociological perspective. He described three fundamental tenets of symbolic interactionism. First, Blumer posited, people act toward things according to the meanings that they have assigned to them. Second, the meanings of things are produced from social interactions with others. Third, individuals shape and organize these meanings through cognitive analysis so they can understand and engage with the things that comprise their social world (Kivisto, 2013).

22

My research is, in essence, a case study of the Seedling Project. Creswell (as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 259) defines a case study as an examination (the study) of a specifically defined entity or a system with specifically defined boundaries (the case). There is a wide range of opinion in academe as to what exactly constitutes a case study. However, a generally accepted definition is that a case study analyzes a single unit (an entity, system, concept, or phenomenon) by using multiple types and sources of information that are rich in detail and depth (Patton, 2015). As such, case studies have great capacity to capture rich, vivid details. These types of studies work well for applied fields of study such as social work. They also are a good study design for analyzing rare or one-time phenomena.

Case studies often employ qualitative research methods, and so this type of study uses a holistic style of inquiry. There is quite a bit of flexibility of choice for the researcher in defining the unit of study, the emphasis of the study, the units of analysis, and research methods. Case studies can be conducted as pilot studies and during almost any point during the research process (Patton, 2015).

Although researchers favor case studies for their flexibility in a number for factors and their ability to capture rich experiences, this type of study design does raise concern among some researchers. The findings must be accurately interpreted and the researcher must ground their analysis in existing literature. Some researchers hold a view that data from case studies is not relevant to a larger population, or that case studies can too easily lack depth and rigor and therefore, validity.

The constructionist view asserts that reality is subjective; it forms through the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals (Patton, 2014). My study uses symbolic interactionism, a constructionist framework of inquiry, to find out the meanings that individuals make from their

experiences in the Seedling Project. Each person lived their own experiences in the Seedling

Project that, when coupled with their own perceptions and past experiences, produced unique

outcomes for each person. In addition, my experiences as a college student, as one who

experienced food insecurity, and as a researcher who is active in the study setting, contribute to

the findings of the study. My experiences form my perspective, and my perspective pertains to

my positionality as the researcher of this study.

Researcher Positionality

As the primary researcher of this study, I am an instrument of data collection and data

analysis (Patton, 2015). In addition to data from interviews and documents, my data analysis

includes data from personal observations and field notes that I made while I participated in

planning and organizing, while I worked with students, and while I photographed activities of the

Seedling Project. I identified potential biases that I may harbor as an academic and researcher

who was also a participant of the Seedling Project for the entire three years of its existence. I

would like to point out that because I have personal experiences with food insecurity and hunger,

I feel very passionate about these issues, and they have instilled a drive in me to work to improve

access to healthy food for disenfranchised people in my community.

On several occasions in the past, I lived in a food insecure household. For example, when

I was a young mother, I suddenly found myself without an income. I was single, I had a 15-

month-old baby, and I had no food in the house. A farmer I knew took me to his garden, filled

several bags with produce, and gave it all to me. In addition, he added a loaf of bread and a

package of frozen meat. My household food status instantly changed from nothing to eat to

plenty to eat. At that point I realized the value of having a garden, and I have been growing my

own food ever since. Through the years, gardening was the main strategy that I used to ensure

that my household food supply supplied adequate nutrition for my family. I was even able to share surplus produce with extended family members and a local nursing home.

After my children grew up and moved away, I became a nontraditional student at IUP. Due to my restructured daily life, I could no longer maintain my garden. While I was a student, there were several times that I experienced hunger and food insecurity. During the times that I went hungry, or when I could only afford foods that were cheap and unhealthy, I felt unwell and disheartened. I was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about it because I felt that in some way, I should have been able to provide better for myself. Because I have experienced it firsthand, I understand how food insecurity can become an oppressive and disruptive phenomenon in one's life. The urgent drive to provide adequate nutritional needs for one's own children while resources are scarce can become an all-encompassing part of daily life, as I have also experienced.

As I mentioned earlier, my garden produced nutritious food for my family and was a major factor in sustaining food security in my household. I feel strongly that growing one's own food can effectively increase affordable access to fresh foods and improve household food security for many households. During my experiences as a college student, I discovered that there can be barriers to implementing this strategy. When I was offered the opportunity to become involved in the Seedling Project by sharing my gardening expertise, I enthusiastically accepted. One of the Seedling Project's objectives, which is to provide people with the supplies and knowledge they need to grow their own food, is an ideal that I feel passionate about and one in which I can personally relate.

By being a college student before and during my research, I associate well with other college students. I am also at ease with interacting with food pantry patrons because we have

common experiences. My own experiences as a student and in struggling with food insecurity and hunger helped form my emic perspective in my research. An emic perspective is an insider's perspective of the actions and the individuals in a study (Patton, 2015). These experiences aided me in attaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of the informants in my study as well as my own observations. Patton (2014) notes that in studies that employ the constructionist framework of symbolic interactionism, the researcher should have extensive background knowledge and be engaged with informants and the study setting. I acknowledge that my experiences with food insecurity, as a gardener, as a planner in the Seedling Project, and as a participating observer can all potentially enhance as well as hinder my subjectivity as a researcher.

My emic perspective, my familiarity with the population from which I drew my study sample, and my long-term involvement with the Seedling Project's planning activities all helped me become an "insider." My insider perspective afforded me an empathetic and deeper understanding of activities occurring within the settings of my study. As an insider, it was easy for me to engage myself in the activities. My insider perspective sharpened my powers of observation during participant observations. In addition, it helped me establish rapport in my interviews with informants.

However, while in some ways I am an "insider", in other ways I remain an "outsider." Moreover, facets of my position that make me an outsider can also present me as having a position of power. For example, regarding students, I am older than most of them. I am a graduate student among undergraduates. In addition, during 2015 and 2016, I was Dr. Swauger's graduate assistant in addition to being a planner in the project. Therefore, students may perceive my position as somewhat faculty-oriented and one of power. Regarding clients of the Seedling

Project, I do not and have not lived near any of them, and I am not a "local" of the community. I do not associate with the clients outside of my research activities, Seedling Project activities, or Zion food pantry's activities. I am one of the planners of the Seedling Project and I was a key person in the Indiana Community Garden's initiative to provide fresh produce to food pantry patrons. These roles could be interpreted as positions of power. Regarding the community members, I am likely to be seen as an affiliate the university. I perform roles as both student and researcher, in addition to my role as a planner in the Seedling Project. Their perception that I possess power could affect data from my interviews. Some informants might feel internal pressure to "please me" by providing what they think is "the right answer", rather than their true thoughts or experiences. A community partner might not grant me access to certain information or spaces within the facility if they perceive me as having power. I have to be mindful that I am seen no doubt by some as an agent of the university. I have to be mindful not to let community individuals or organizations feel like I used them for the benefit of the university or my own academic career. I need to let my genuine interest in their peace of mind show through my words and actions.

I was the graduate assistant for the professor who developed the Seedling Project. I have pre-existing relationships with several community individuals who perform significant roles in the Seedling Project. I am evaluating the service learning program of a professor who will evaluate my work as a graduate assistant. I have had to negotiate a fine line between community individuals and professors with whom I worked. While my findings in this study were not entirely positive, I chose to focus on positive findings because of my relationships with these individuals.

My personal experiences with food insecurity and hunger pointed me toward my current research interests, which are food, food insecurity, and gardening. Gardening as a response to food security is a niche in the scholarly literature that is not yet widely studied. My hope is that my research will contribute to this small but growing body of knowledge. My experiences also helped form my initial expectations of what this study's findings would reveal. I assumed that data from clients, planners, and community partners would indicate generally positive views of various aspects of the Seedling Project. I did not intentionally seek data that would confirm my own favorable views of the Seedling Project. Further, I assumed that data from students would not produce much in terms of favorable views about gardening. This assumption stemmed from my own perspective as a college student in that, as a student, it was very difficult for me to find ways to grow my own food. I was so busy with coursework, I seldom thought about gardening.

I am mindful of the constructionist framework of my study, which is that reality is subjective and constructed of multiple realities (Patton, 2015). My experiences factor into the findings of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) inform that the researcher and the subjects are "interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (p. 111). My experiences are real to me; but they are not the experiences of others who are part of my study. My perspective is singular. I also take into account the perspectives and experiences of those in my study to understand the multiple realities constructed by people's experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them.

I continually monitored my progressive subjectivity throughout the development and implementation of this study. I thought about my bias when I determined what my research questions would be, when I designed my interview guides, throughout the interview process, and throughout the data analysis process. I recorded these thoughts in a journal, and as I reflected on

28

my thoughts and decisions as a researcher, I referred back to these notes. I did not seek validation or agreement with my own views about service learning or gardening or the value of the Seedling Project.

Sample Design

I utilized a criterion-based, stratified, convenience sample for this study, described sequentially as follows. This sample design provided me with a variety of experiences and perspectives from individuals who all participated in different ways in the Seedling Project.

Criterion-Based

First, the sample was, by necessity, criterion-based. In criterion-based samples, informants are purposely selected for having some specific feature or characteristic (Patton, 2015). My sample only included informants who had participated in the Seedling Project a) while they were a student of Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course, b) as a client of the Seedling Project, c) as one of the project's planners, or d) a person in an administrative or other significant role at a community organization that was involved in the Seedling Project. These informants were very likely to provide relevant and rich data that sheds light on the research questions of the study. Good qualitative research hinges on, among other factors, information-rich informants, because it uses relatively small sample sizes (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) points out "What would be 'bias' in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength" (p. 264).

In my study, I wanted to find informants that had direct experience in the Seedling Project, but each informant had to fit a specific criterion. In the Students stratum (a description of each stratum will follow) of my sample, the inclusion factor was students who had participated in the Seedling Project while they were enrolled in Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course at

IUP. Students of other IUP college courses had worked in the Seedling Project as volunteers, but these students did not fit the criterion for selection in my purposive sample. Some of my interview questions for informants in the Students strata pertain to service learning. Students outside of Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course and who did not participate in the Seedling Project while in that course would be unable to provide me with data pertaining to service learning experiences or experiences in the classroom.

The criterion for inclusion in the Clients stratum was that the subject, besides being a client of the Seedling Project, had to receive seedlings and/or seeds from one of the Seedling Project's distribution events. Clients who did not come to a distribution event and receive seedlings and/or seeds would not have been able to provide data for this study. The criterion for inclusion in the Planners stratum was that the subject actively took part in the planning, organizing, and decision-making activities of the Seedling Project a) for the first year of the Seedling Project, and b) for more than one year of the Seedling Project. The criterion for inclusion in the Community Partners stratum was that, during the time that the organization participated in the Seedling Project, the subject held a significant position (i.e., a director) at that organization.

Stratified

Further, I utilized stratified sampling in my research design. Patton (2015) describes stratified sampling as samples within a sample" (p. 305). All of the subjects in my sample group possess a key feature; each strata contains informants who each possess some variance of the key feature. In a small study such as this, a diverse range of subjects is desirable, because the result will be a wide range of perspectives and experiences in the data (Patton, 2015). As this study uses a constructionist framework of inquiry, the wide range of people's perspectives,

30

experiences, and meanings contributes to understanding multiple realities of the subjects, and it adds credibility to the research. I used a Students stratum because I wanted to know what their experiences were as service learners for this particular course, and the ways in which students constructed their new knowledge. Similarly, I included a Clients stratum because I wanted to learn more about their experiences in the Seedling Project and what constructions they made from their experiences. I included subjects in a Planners stratum because they would add yet another layer of different experiences and constructs. The Community Partners stratum also contributes to diversity of experiences and constructions of the Seedling Project. Diverse perspectives, experiences, and meanings facilitate comparison and add richness to the findings (Patton, 2015).

Four strata comprised my sample:

- College students who worked in the Seedling Project

- Individuals who were involved in the organizing and planning activities of the Seedling Project

- Clients of the Seedling Project

- Administrators or those in some other significant role of a community organization that was involved in the Seedling Project.

Each stratum consisted of three research subjects. For the Students stratum, students must have been enrolled in the Sociology of Family course at IUP in 2014, 2015, or 2016 and participated in the Seedling Project as part of the service learning component for that course. I excluded individuals who were enrolled in the Sociology of Family course but did not participate in the Seedling Project. I excluded all students who were not enrolled in the Sociology of Family course regardless of their involvement in the Seedling Project. My rationale for including only

31

students who participated in the Seedling Project as part of their service learning component of the Sociology of Family course was because other service learning courses may have had learning objectives that differed from the Sociology of Family course objectives, or they may simply have been involved as volunteers.

The Clients stratum included individuals who had signed up to receive seedlings, seeds, and/or buckets of soil during one of the seedling distribution events of the Seedling Project. I excluded clients who signed up but did not show up to a seedling distribution to receive their gardening supplies.

The Planners stratum included individuals who actively took part in the planning, organizing, and decision-making activities of the Seedling Project a) for the first year of the Seedling Project, and b) for more than one year of the Seedling Project. The Community Partners stratum included individuals who held a significant position at their organization such as, but not limited to, a director. I excluded individuals who held a significant position at their organization but whose work was unrelated to their organization's involvement with the Seedling Project. The excluded individuals would not have been able to provide me with the kind of detailed information regarding outcomes that stemmed from the organization's involvement with the Seedling Project.

The sample is comprised of four strata, each with three informants. Given the likelihood that most students would have left the study area for the summer, and my expectation of some degree of attrition between my contact with students and the interview appointment, three was a realistic number of cases to strive for. A total of twelve cases appeared to be a reasonable number of cases for a study of this size and that would provide a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Moreover, there were only three planners besides myself who fit the criteria for my

convenience sample, so it would have been impossible to garner more than three cases for the Planners stratum.

Convenience

Saumure and Given (as cited in Patton, 2015) define a convenience sample as "a sample in which research participants are selected based on their ease of availability" (p. 2309). My convenience sample comprised a total of 12 individuals who were involved in the Seedling Project during the years of 2014, 2015, or 2016, or a combination of those years I used convenience sampling in my sample design because I needed informants who could describe their experiences as participants of or involvement in the Seedling Project. However, most IUP students had already left the region for their summer break when I began recruiting subjects. Further, I did not have access to any contact information of the students. Dr. Swauger contacted them by email on my behalf, and the informants that made up my Students stratum were those voluntarily responded to the email and agreed to be interviewed. Informants in the Clients stratum were provided to me by their peer counselor; I did not need to recruit them myself. In the Planners and Community Partners strata, individuals who fit the criteria were few in numbers, so I could interview all of them. All of the informants in the Planners and Community Partners strata were close by, and all were easy for me to contact.

Students stratum. I wanted to capture data from students, clients, planners, and community partners involved with the Seedling Project so that I could look for central emerging themes during data analysis. Patton (2015) states that "common themes that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (p. 283).

I drafted a letter of invitation for students that explained my study asked them for an interview with me about their experiences in the Seedling Project. The only students who received this letter were those who had participated in the Seedling Project as a student in Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course. The letter ensured that their standing as an IUP student and/or sociology student would not be affected by their decision to participate or not in my study. I sent the letter to Dr. Swauger who then emailed the letter to her students on my behalf. Dr. Swauger was the only person who had access to the list of student contact information.

Students who were interested in being interviewed responded to the invitation by emailing a response to me. Four students emailed me and indicated their interest in an interview. I explained my study to each respondent and asked for a voluntary 30 minute interview either at a location they felt was comfortable and convenient, or by telephone. Three of the students agreed to be interviewed. One student stopped communicating with me before we could choose an interview appointment. All of the interviewees chose to be interviewed by telephone because they had moved away from the area, and an in-person interview was not possible. At the start of each interview session, and before I began asking questions from my interview guide, I read the entire consent form aloud and then asked each informant if they had any questions. Then, each informant gave me verbal consent for the interview and permission to record it with a digital recorder. I emailed each subject an unsigned consent form for their own records.

Planners stratum and Community Partners stratum. I sent emails requesting interviews to three individuals who were involved in planning and/or organizing the Seedling Project and three coordinators of community organizations who had partnered with the Seedling Project. All of these individuals consented to be interviewed. Each informant chose the location for their interview. Before an interview began, I presented every informant with a paper consent

form to read, and I encouraged them to take all the time that they needed to read the form and ask questions. I provided each informant with an unsigned copy of the consent form, and I kept the copy that contained their signatures. After a subject signed the consent form, I turned on the digital recorder and conducted an interview.

An exception to the protocol I just described was my interview with Dr. Swauger. I emailed her to request an interview, and she agreed to do a telephone interview. During the drafting stages of creating the interview consent forms for this study, I consulted with Dr. Swauger several times about the language in the forms; she reviewed the forms and offered suggestions. Therefore, since she was already quite familiar with the consent forms, I did not read it aloud to Dr. Swauger before our telephone interview began, but I emailed it to her afterward as a PDF attachment. I conducted in-person interviews with all of the other subjects of the Planners and Community Partners strata.

Clients stratum. When I obtained site approval from the branch manager of Unity Family Services to interview their clients, they requested that when I planned to interview their clients, I should contact the organization ahead of time, and a peer counselor would recruit informants for me. The staff at Unity Family Services felt that this procedure would add a layer of anonymity for their clients. As instructed, four days prior to when the interviews took place, I contacted a peer counselor of Unity Family Services by telephone, asking for an appropriate time to come to the facility and recruit subjects for interviews. After she confirmed the site manager's approval for the interviews, the peer counselor set up a time for me to show up. The day I arrived at Unity Family, most of their clients were present, and they were socializing with one another and the staff. Based on my field notes and past observations of this setting, it was a normal and typical social event at this facility. One person was talking to the peer counselor and me about

why I had come to Unity Family Services that day. As I asked the informant for the interview, the peer counselor and I asked at the same time. In a private office, I provided a paper interview consent form, and I allowed all the time that the subject needed to read the form and ask questions. I gave the subject an unsigned copy of the consent form to keep, and I kept the copy that contained permission signatures for the interview and for recording the interview. After a subject signed the consent form, I turned on the digital recorder and conducted an interview. The peer counselor selected the two more subjects while I was interviewing the first one. I conducted each subsequent interview using the same procedure that I used with the first subject.

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Data Collection

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The purpose of this study was to determine what the outcomes were for students who were involved in the Seedling Project, and the ways and extent to which the Indiana community was affected by the Seedling Project. In this subsection I explain how I collected my data. I also discuss the interview guide used for each stratum. The interview guides can be reviewed in the appendices.

Interviews

I obtained primary data through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is guided by an interview guide that contains a list of open-ended questions, and allows probing a respondent's answer with further questions to obtain detailed, rich data (Bernard, 2011; Patton, 2015). In one-on-one interviews, the subject retains anonymity, and for that reason he/she may feel more at ease with explaining something in greater detail versus speaking in a group setting. During one-on-one interviews, the researcher can observe non-verbal cues expressed by the subject. Non-verbal cues can indicate if a subject is comfortable and relaxed during questioning, or if subject is becoming uncomfortable. Non-verbal cues could indicate that

a subject might want to say something but is uncertain whether or not to speak about it. They can also indicate if a respondent is being untruthful. I used an interview guide for every interview, and I used a different interview guide for each stratum.

Interview Guides

Twelve questions in the student interview guide center around students' service learning experiences and their views about Seedling Project itself. I designed the questions to be general and open-ended to afford probing the interviewees for more details. I was interested in learning about some of the most memorable moments of their service learning experiences, and what made these experiences memorable. Questions in the interview guide asked how students came to learn what they know about the issues that they studied in Dr. Swauger's course. Other questions were designed to draw data that evidenced transformative learning, without blatantly asking if the subject had experienced transformative learning. The interview guides can be found in the appendices.

The Clients interview guide contained five questions, the least questions of all four strata interview guides. The questions are very simple and open-ended. Based on many past interactions I have had with the population from which I drew my client sample, I know that some of the clients may be on medications, or have mental acuity issues, or are socially introverted. I presumed the likelihood that my client sample would include informants who may have one or more of these issues. Moreover, I am aware that I was likely to be perceived to have a position of power. I am white, I am affiliated with the university, and I performed roles as an organizer of the Seedling Project. Another way I could have been seen as having power was by being in the role of researcher during my interviews with the clients. For these reasons, I kept the questions simple and only sought further details when opportunities arose during the interviews.

In retrospect, I believe that I should have asked clients to talk about their experiences with students.

The Planners interview guide contained twelve questions overall, plus an additional six questions intended exclusively for Dr. Swauger. She is one of the planners of the Seedling Project, but her vantage point as the instructor of the Sociology of Family course and her perspective were both invaluable for providing rich details about her students' learning experiences of which other planners would probably have no knowledge. Several questions in the interview guide pertained to planners' behind-the-scenes activities of the Seedling Project. I included questions about collaboration within the group. I also included questions that asked subjects if they saw others benefiting from the Seedling Project. In looking back, I realize that these particular questions should have been reworded to ask for evidence of effects, not benefits, on others.

The interview guide for the Community Partners contained six simple, open-ended questions. This set of questions sought to gather data on the perspective of the community partner, an area that is rather sparse in the scholarly literature. The questions ask how the community partner viewed the organization's collaboration with the Seedling Project. I wanted to know what it was like for the organization to have students and members of IUP conducting activities at their facility, and if it affected or shaped the organization's view of the university.

Participant Observation

As an "instrument of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 46), my observations and experiences from direct involvement in the Seedling Project's planning, development, and execution stages contribute data to this study. Participant observation involves the researcher's observations of the activities of the people of a study through observing and participating in the

activities. The researcher's observations provide data that is later written about in rich detail and depth (Patton, 2015). The participant observer learns things that are not mentioned in interviews. The participant observer immerses him/herself into the setting of the study in order to develop an emic, "insider" perspective of the setting and the activities occurring. The participant observer observes what is going on, "but also feels what it is like to be a part of the setting or program" (Patton, 2015, p. 338). A vulnerability of participant observations is that the researcher can become so personally immersed that his/her objectivity diminishes, and with it, the capacity for accurate interpretation of observations. Participant observations are capable of producing rich data and information that might not be obtainable through other collection methods. However, some subjects may alter their normal behavior if they know they are being observed. Moreover, if participant observations are made in a covert manner as a strategy to circumvent artificial behavior, ethical issues of deception and trust arise.

In my study setting, during casual conversations with individuals that I interacted with and had previously established rapport, I mentioned numerous times that I was conducting a study of the Seedling Project for my masters thesis. I began my involvement in the Seedling Project as a participant, and I observed what was occurring around me. Once I knew for sure that the topic of my masters thesis would be the Seedling Project, I maintained an awareness of my role as a researcher and maintained a continuous critical self-assessment of my position. This self-assessment continued through the data collection and analysis phases of my research. After I completed interviews and observations, and as I analyzed data, I wrote notes of my reflective thoughts.

Data Analysis

I conducted an inductive analysis of data and followed standard analytic steps for qualitative data analysis, which includes preparation, organizing, and reporting. Inductive analysis involves "searching through the data for patterns and themes without any predetermined analytical categories" (Patton, 2015, p. 551). During preparation, I conducted a content analysis of my data. This is a preliminary step in the data analysis process. Content analysis is simply examining the text by reading through it multiple times to find recurring words (Patton, 2015). The recurring words constitute categories and themes.

Next, I coded the data by reading the printed transcriptions several times and writing descriptive codes in the margins next to passages of corresponding text. Each category of interviews (students, clients, planners, and community partners) was coded independently with codes that I developed. Some of the codes were applicable to text in other interviews. First, I identified categories such as "gardening" and "cross-cultural," and so on. Then, I assigned themes into relevant categories, for example, under the "gardening" category, I put "self-empowering", "confidence", and "physical activity." I read through the text several times again to identify any emerging themes that did not seem to neatly "match" anything, but still could be relevant. Next, I looked for thematic correlations between the categories. I used thematic analysis of my text-based coded data to identify specific outcomes. I made reflective notes of my interpretations and my thoughts when I first read the transcriptions, when I coded the data, and when I analyzed and interpreted the data. Next, I looked for thematic correlations.

Assurance of Quality

Qualitative research, as in all research, relies on thorough, consistent application of well established, standard research methods to produce credible findings. I used standard, widely

practiced research procedures to help ensure that my findings were what truly emerged from the data and were not just results of my own biases. I was very familiar with the culture of the organizations in my study before my actual research began. I was involved in the Seedling Project from its beginning, I have interacted extensively with patrons of the Zion food pantry and the staff, and I was (and still am) involved with the Indiana Community Garden.

I used more than one method for gathering data; I used both personal observations and interviews. I also studied documents to help develop the context of my study. They were also useful for verifying data from some of the interviews. Four strata of subjects comprised a wide range of informants in my sample. Prior to interviews and just before each interview, I reminded each informant that they were free to refuse to participate. I assured students that whatever they said during the interview, and/or their decision to participate or not in an interview would not affect their standing in any way as a student in Dr. Swauger's course or at IUP. None of the interviewees were compensated with money or any other form of payment for participating in the study.

During interviews, each informant's comfort and relaxed state of mind was my priority. While interviewing, I used member checks. During an interview, the researcher iterates responses back to the informant. This provides an opportunity for the interviewer to verify that he/she understand what the informant communicated. It also provides an opportunity for the informant to affirm his/her response, or to correct the response (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I observed non-verbal cues of each informant during the interviews. After I transcribed interviews, I sent transcriptions of them to interviewees so they could verify that I accurately captured their words. Additionally, I analyzed documents such as annual reports of community organizations and a class syllabus. These documents were helpful in developing the context of my study.

41

Multiple sources of data and methods of data collection enhance the credibility of my research through triangulation. As a qualitative methodology tool, triangulation affords the means to compare and contrast data gathered from different sources, in addition to producing thick descriptive findings (Patton, 2015).

I monitored myself for evidence of progressive subjectivity during my research process. Progressive subjectivity is the researcher's continual reflection on his/her own biases, assumptions, and opinions that were present at the outset of the study and self-analysis of "the researcher's own developing constructions" (Shenton, 2004, p. 68). I recorded my initial expectations of findings that I thought my study might produce. I kept an audit trail of my field notes and notes I made during data analysis. I wrote down questions that emerged during my research activities. In addition to my thoughts about my expectations, emerging questions and hunches, and what I eventually did find, my field notes included my observations. Through exercising progressive subjectivity, the researcher assesses his/her own perceptions. This helps assure the researcher that interpretation of data is not formed from the researcher's own biases; instead, it accurately represents the perceptions, experiences, and meanings of the informants (Patton, 2015).

I wrote what I observed, heard, and touched during my observations. I included notes on methodology; I described how I collected the data, and my thoughts about the data collection process, and the quality of the data collected. In addition, in my field notes, I reflected and wrote about the state of my "self" during data collection. When I could discern an emerging theme, I noted that as well. I continued to write my thoughts and make analytic notes during data analysis, and in writing up my thesis. I acknowledge that further studies are needed to capture an in-depth

understanding of the experiences and phenomena of individuals associated with the Seedling Project.

This chapter contains descriptions of the methods I used to conduct this qualitative study. I analyzed documents and websites of community partners, and the syllabus of the Sociology of Family course. I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with 12 informants. I used a criterion-based, stratified, convenience-based sampling strategy. There were four strata in my sample: students, clients, project planners, and community partners. I interviewed three informants from each stratum. This provided me with a rich variety of perspectives and experiences for analysis. I coded data in an aggregated form, and assigned coded data to themes that emerged in order to investigate the experiences of participants of the Seedling Project. This chapter explained the foundation of my study.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STAKEHOLDERS

The Seedling Project

The Seedling Project is a university-and-community-based coalition in western

Pennsylvania that first began as a pilot service learning project for sociology undergraduate

students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The project's objectives are to 1) provide clients

of food pantries with seedlings and supplies so they can grow their own food, increase their

access to fresh produce, and feel a sense of empowerment; and 2) provide meaningful service

learning experiences for students as part of their course requirements (McCann, 2014).

Dr. Swauger's Sociology of Family course teaches students how contemporary American

families are adapting to changing social, economic, and political environments, and the roles

social inequality and social policy play in family formation. As students examine the statistical

picture of poverty in Indiana County and learn about the consequences of poverty in the

classroom, they also engage with local community organizations and residents through service

work in the Seedling Project. They meet and learn the stories of impoverished people who work

hard to keep their families afloat. The students work with community partners to solicit

donations from local and regional businesses, gather necessary supplies, and help clients choose

plants and seeds during the seedling distribution events.

When Dr. Swauger and Amber Book were developing the Seedling Project, they

contacted the Indiana Community Garden for guidance on horticultural considerations of the

project. As certified Master Gardeners and volunteer committee members of the garden, Dr. Kay

Snyder (IUP Sociology professor emeritus) and I volunteered as community partners to help with

the project. tabulating survey results, and helping the clients during distribution events. Every year, I photographed students while they performed most activities.

The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

The hub for the food distribution network in southwestern pa is the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (GPCFB), a 501c(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to "feed people in need and mobilize our community to eliminate hunger" (GPCFB(a), n.d.).

The GPCFB first began serving people in need in June 1980. At the time, it had a 2000 square foot warehouse located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. In 1999 the food bank moved to its newest facility, a LEED-certified (resource-efficient) 94000 square-foot headquarters and warehouse in Duquesne, a neighboring city within the Pittsburgh metropolitan area.

The GPCFB collaborates with numerous food assistance programs such as community food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, and senior programs, to form a comprehensive distribution network of more than 400 organizations and programs. This distribution network includes Partner Distribution Organizations, hereafter referred to as PDOs. PDOs are smaller food banks that work in partnership with GPCFB to extend the reach of the food distribution network into 11 counties in western Pennsylvania. Each PDO receives food deliveries from GPCFB, which then allocates the foods to various soup kitchens, meal programs, and small food pantries within its area. Through this distribution network, the GPCFB annually disperses more than 26 million pounds of food to 360,000 people (GPCFB(b), n.d.). In Indiana County, the designated PDO is the Indiana County Community Action Program (ICCAP).

Indiana County Community Action Program

In a landmark effort to eliminate poverty and its consequences in the U.S., President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964. The Act called for forming

and funding eleven initiatives: Adult Basic Education, Neighborhood Youth Corp, the Work

Study program, assistance to needy children and to migrant agricultural workers, loans to rural

families and small businesses, formation of the Job Corp and VISTA, and the formation of local

Community Action Agencies. The function of a Community Action Agency is to address and

alleviate the causes of poverty, the difficulties raised by poverty, and to reduce or eliminate

poverty. These goals are addressed (and sometimes met) by managing federal, state, and local

funding and resources to match low-income area residents and families with the resources and

opportunities they need to help them achieve self-reliance (Community Services Consortium,

2016). Whether its status as a business entity is private or non-profit, each agency involves a

diverse range of community members, from elected officials to low-income individuals, in its

governing Board.

Stemming from the Economic Opportunity Act, in 1965 the Indiana County Board of

Commissioners appointed the Indiana County Community Action Program (ICCAP) as the

county's Community Action Agency. ICCAP is one of 43 Community Action Agencies in

Pennsylvania. There are more than 1000 such agencies throughout the U.S.

ICCAP's headquarters are located in the Courthouse Annex building at 827 Water Street

in the town of Indiana. The agency provides an interface for residents to access services to help

them achieve self-sufficiency. ICCAP's array of 20 different services and programs include case

management services, housing assistance and related programs, utility assistance programs, an

employment preparation program, a homeless shelter, and a food bank that coordinates monthly

food distributions at local food pantries.

ICCAP initiated its food bank program in 1983. It manages the region's participation in

several federal and state food assistance programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance

Program, the Pennsylvania State Food Assistance Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the SNAP Outreach Program. ICCAP's food warehouse is located on the outskirts of the Indiana borough at 1849 South 6th Street. ICCAP's food bank program employs 27 staff members and more than 700 volunteers. Twice every month, GPCFB delivers canned and packaged foods plus fresh, seasonal produce to the warehouse. Food bank workers deliver the foods to area pantries within Indiana County.

ICCAP oversees a network of 18 food pantries located in boroughs and townships throughout Indiana County. This food distribution network disperses more than 25 tons of food annually to low-income residents. During fiscal year 2014-2015, 3646 residents received food from ICCAP. In addition to managing a network of community food pantries, ICCAP's food bank program also provides food to the county's older and younger residents. A federal program called the Commodity Supplemental Food Program allocates funds for ICCAP to provide 463 county seniors with a supplementary box of food every month. The box contains canned vegetables, juice, and grains. The Power Pack program provides 700 elementary school children from low-income households with a bag of nutritious food twice every month. Each bag contains enough food for a weekend for a child.

Zion Food Pantry

Another source of food is the Zion Food Pantry, a community outreach program of Zion Lutheran Church. The church is located at the corner of Church Street and South 6th Avenue in the Indiana borough. It is a large, impressive grey stone building. The food pantry operates out of the church basement, in the "community hall" of the church.

The community hall is quite large at 60 feet long by 30 feet wide. One end of the hall is positioned in the innermost region of the church. The other end of the hall reaches to the exterior

walls of the church. At the interior end of the hall, two separate stairways lead up to the main floor of the church, and near side doors that provide access to Church Street. On both lengthwise sides of the community hall there are smaller areas that can be closed off by vinyl, accordion-like sliding partitions. These side rooms serve as classrooms for Sunday school. During food distributions, one of the two stairways is off limits to patrons; it is used by the church staff. At the bottom of the other stairway, a table is designated as the check-in area and a staff member is seated there. Patrons form a line in this stairway awaiting their turn to show proof of eligibility, or to sign up as a new patron, before they proceed forward to the other two tables that contain dozens of prefilled bags of food.

Once patrons receive their bags of food, they carry them (or someone assists them) and walk to the other end of the community room, through a set of steel doors, to some steps that lead upward to an exterior door. Exiting this door, one will be standing at the corner of Church Street and 6th Avenue. Some patrons have their own vehicle parked alongside the church building. Some individuals carpool with others or a driver waits for them. A few individuals must walk home while carrying their bags of food.

Other rooms in the church basement and adjacent to the community hall are a kitchen outfitted with commercial food preparation and cooking equipment; and another room that measures approximately ten feet wide by 25 feet long. This is the storeroom of the food pantry. The lengthwise walls are lined with sturdy shelving units that hold mostly canned and boxed food, but sometimes soaps and toiletries are stored there too. A solid table occupies the middle of the room. The table is used for loading and unloading food items.

The food pantry began 22 years ago when several people came into the church looking for food. One church parishioner searched her cupboards for food to donate. As time went on,

the goodwill effort continued and expanded. The food pantry runs entirely on donations and grants; it receives no governmental funding. It provides food to approximately 130 individuals and families every month. Some patrons have relied on the food pantry for 12 years or more. On average, four to ten families sign up every month for the food pantry. In 2016, the food pantry experienced an increase in the number of referrals to its program. The Zion Food Bank recently began purchasing food through ICCAP because it was a more reliable supply source than past suppliers. Moreover, food costs less by purchasing it through ICCAP than through prior distributors.

Presently, three people manage the food pantry, and several additional volunteers help out when extra manpower is needed to help with tasks like packing bags with groceries, carrying out bags for food patrons, or unloading a food delivery from a truck. The worker who is the liaison between the food pantry and the Seedling Project has been involved with the program for 12 years. Her husband manages the inventory and deliveries. They both are retired from IUP. The third person helps keep records and helps new patrons sign up for food, and assists wherever else is needed at different times. These three individuals share equally in the responsibilities and workload of the food pantry.

The food pantry is open from 9:00 to 11:00 am every second and fourth Monday of the month. Once per month, patrons receive three grocery bags filled with nonperishable food items like canned foods and prepackaged foods. Patrons decide whether they want to come to the first or the second monthly distribution. Most choose to come to the first distribution.

Indiana Community Garden

The Indiana Community Garden began in April 2012. It is an ongoing project of Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Indiana County. The steering committee is comprised of six

to ten individuals, depending on the year. The steering committee maintains a website dedicated to the garden, and it is in the process of forming a set of bylaws and a formal governing structure. The garden rents garden plots to anyone in the community for a nominal fee.

The community garden is located in Mack Park, at the corner of Carter Street and 6th Avenue. It occupies one acre of space inside the northeast corner of the park. This location is a high visibility area. During the growing season, numerous raised-bed garden plots lush with verdant vegetation comprise beautiful scenery for passersby. There are private 24 raised bed garden plots, and each one measures four feet by 12 feet. Every growing season, individuals and families rent these plots in order to grow their own food and flowers.

In addition to 24 private plots, there are three larger plots at the community garden. Two of them measure approximately five feet wide by 20 feet long. The third large plot is shaped like a capitol "I" and measures approximately 25 feet long by 10 feet wide at its widest point. Although they vary in length and width, all of the plots at the community garden are 12 inches high. Another structure at the site is a gas well enclosed by an eight foot chain link fence with a locked gate. Royal Gas & Oil Company owns and maintains the well.

There is a pavilion near the west edge of the community garden. Tool sheds and a rainwater collection system are installed on the backside of the structure. There is a pergola across the front of the pavilion. There are two park-style picnic tables underneath the pavilion. The pavilion functions as a place for socializing, holding meetings, exchanging information, and as a shady respite from the hot summer sun. A bulletin board and a dry erase board provide facilitate information exchange among gardeners. A display case mounted on the wall holds awards the garden received from Welcome To Indiana and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. A multiple-compartment wall organizer holds bulletins containing horticultural

information. Approximately 50 feet north of the pavilion is a water hydrant. It is near the edge of the community garden that borders Carter Avenue.

The mission of the Indiana Community Garden (n.d.)   states that:

The Indiana Community Garden project seeks to create a healthy and enjoyable community movement through planting, harvesting, cultivating, educating, cooking and sharing of knowledge and ideas. Together, all aspects of community garden will be promoted, explored and implemented.

The garden hosts numerous social events during the spring, summer, and fall, including children's gardening activities, harvesting, cooking and gardening demonstrations, family activities, ethnobotanical demonstrations, and service opportunities for students. Volunteers at the garden grow foods in the larger public beds. They foods are available for anyone who needs them. Sometimes, volunteer instructors use them for teaching gardening, harvesting and cooking techniques. But mostly, the foods are donated to the Zion food pantry.

Chevy Chase Community Center

The Chevy Chase Community Center (CCCC) is home to the Chevy Chase Community Action Council, Inc. The council (Chevy Chase Community Center, 2014) originated in 1969 and is a non-profit, tax-exempt entity. The council is frequently referred to as the Chevy Chase Community Center. Its function is to combat local poverty and, according to its mission statement (p. 3),

To provide a venue for community members to offer support and

services to assist residents who live in poverty by ensuring they

have access to vital human services, food, education and recreation

programs that will improve their quality of life and enhance the

greater community.

The CCCC is governed by a 12 member Board of Directors. The organization owns the community center and the land it sits on. The community center is located in Chevy Chase Heights, a small neighborhood that is adjacent to the Indiana borough.

The facility is a single-story concrete block structure. Offices and activity rooms are located in the front half of the building. The middle of the building contains a restroom, a janitor closet, and a large commercial kitchen that adjoins a very large community room located at the back of the building. A central hallway provides access to all of the rooms. It goes from the front door, down the center of the building, and ends at the community room.

The community room is approximately 50 feet wide by 60 feet long. It spans the entire width of the facility and half of the building's length. The room has a black and white checkerboard-style linoleum floor and several ceiling fans above. Double doors on the back wall provide access to a small parking lot and alley behind the building. Numerous programs and services take place in this room; one in particular is a hot lunch program where healthy meals are cooked on-site and served free of charge to anyone who wants it. In 2015 and 2016, seedling distributions took place in this community room.

The CCCC holds numerous youth activities, after-school programs, clothing events, film screenings, and community meetings. The CCCC offers health education and preventative services to individuals and families as well as assistance with applying for governmental human service programs. The CCCC also established a community garden on a nearby lot. Foods grown in the garden are used in balanced, nutritious meals, which are cooked in the kitchen and served in the community room.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

These findings represent data collected from 12 subjects who were involved in the Seedling Project at some point during 2014, 2015, and/or 2016. Through this data, I looked for answers to my main research questions, which are: What outcomes do community partners perceive from participating in the Seedling Project? What outcomes do IUP services learning students perceive from participating in the Seedling Project?

My findings suggest that there were multiple outcomes for the students and for the community.

I will begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of the outcomes for students, and then I will discuss each of the outcomes. I have identified four outcomes for students, which include 1) increased awareness of food insecurity and poverty, 2) benefits of cross-cultural experiences, 3) realization of gardening as self-empowering, and 4) transformative learning. Next, I will provide a brief overview of the outcomes for the community. I have identified two outcomes for the community, which includes 1) A new initiative that provides locally grown produce to food pantry patrons, and 2) restoration of the Chevy Chase Community garden.

Student Outcomes

Overall, the data indicate that students saw value in the Seedling Project. They understood that food insecurity is a household-level economic predicament, and they understood how it affects individuals and families. Students recognized that junk food is cheaper and easier to get than healthy food. They learned that food insecurity and poverty are persistent problems in Indiana County as well as nationwide.

Further, students gained cross-cultural experiences with clients and with community volunteers in the Seedling Project. Their cross-cultural experiences helped them understand and

recognize that food insecurity exists in Indiana County. Cross-cultural experiences also helped students break down stereotypes that they may have had about impoverished and working poor groups of people. One particularly interesting outcome is that students saw gardening as an effective strategy that empowered people to improve their food situation, and it provided them with other benefits. I also found evidence that at least for some students, their experiences in the Seedling Project were transformative. Service learning experiences dissolved stereotypes, influenced long-term career goals, and fueled interest in continued involvement in community service.

Increased Awareness of Food Insecurity and Poverty

Students gained an awareness of food insecurity and poverty in Indiana County and a deeper understanding of the general concepts. Through my interview with Dr. Swauger, I learned that students understood how poverty is institutionalized. She said that her students reported that they made the connection between course material and real life experiences. When I interviewed one of Dr. Swauger's students, the student told me that she developed "an understanding of what life in poverty is like." Another student noted that even food banks occasionally run out of food. Dr. Swauger also mentioned how impressed students were about the clients showing off photos of the foods they had grown. She said her students thought that gardening empowered the clients. I asked one of the planners if she observed any evidence that students benefitted from their service work. She said, "A lot more have become aware that there is some sort of hunger problem…and I don't think that has been on their radar before."

In addition to understanding the concept of food insecurity, students understood that it is both a local and a national problem. Dr. Swauger noted that in their reflection essays, students described their developing awareness of food security as an under-recognized problem. They

were previously unaware that poverty and food insecurity existed in Indiana County. During one interview, a student told me that most people saw food insecurity as a third-world issue. She added, "But it's something that's going on in our back yard, in our own communities. People don't have food!"

Benefits of Cross-Cultural Experiences

There were numerous opportunities for students to engage in cross-cultural interactions with clients, planners, and community volunteers during every stage of development in each year's Seedling Project. These opportunities arose in late February, when students visited local food pantries and the Chevy Chase Community Center to sign up clients for the project. They continued in mid-April during soil preparation days, and during the seedling distributions that took place late April and early May. At first, some students were hesitant to approach someone from outside of their own culture, but their hesitations were quite brief. The students accepted opportunities to interact with others. Perhaps the students made on-the-fly reassessments about pre-existing stereotypes that they may have been harboring. I will explore possible reasons for their hesitation in Chapter Six.

Quite a number of students found that cross-cultural experiences made a "tremendous" impact on them. For example, one student recalled that, prior to her involvement in the Seedling Project, she had participated in numerous fundraisers and events for homelessness in Indiana County. However, until she worked in this project, she had never met a real homeless person. Her personal interactions with homeless people and others she encountered during her service work made her realize that she possessed great empathy for people in need. Dr. Swauger also recounted a story from another of her students' final papers. She said the student wrote that when she went to sign up clients for the Seedling Project, she encountered a homeless man who was

eating his free hot lunch. Even though the student was a complete stranger to the man, he offered to share his food with her. The student was profoundly moved by this interaction with the man, and she said, "I couldn't believe he was offering to share what was probably his only meal of the day."

Cross-cultural experiences with clients and community volunteers provided some of the most meaningful service learning experiences for students. They valued time that they spent with the clients and took every opportunity to talk to them. For example, one sociology senior said that her most meaningful experiences in the Seedling Project involved talking to local individuals who were long-time residents of Indiana. She reflected, "…it was really nice to understand a culture…I realized how much I didn't know. How disconnected I was with the community outside IUP…"

One way students could interact with food pantry clients was by helping to transport buckets of soil and boxes of plants for the clients on distribution day; and when needed, they carried bags of food for them. Dr. Swauger said that during her in-class reflection activities, students talked about how they loved hearing the clients' stories, and they were moved by them. The experiences helped them learn and understand the resilience of food pantry clients and the struggles they face. She also said that the experiences broke down students' stereotypes of the demeanor and mindset of the poor. Students told me that these one-on-one experiences "put a face on the concepts that they were learning about" in class, and that the experiences helped them see "how documentaries and texts we read about food insecurity could play out in real life."

Realization of Gardening as Empowerment

I learned from interviews with students, their professor, and community members that the Seedling Project helped students realize multiple benefits in gardening. They saw gardening as a strategy to combat food insecurity, and that it empowered clients to improve their household food supply. Students perceived that gardening produces nutritious food, and that gardening could help to strengthen social ties. I will outline these multiple benefits further in the following paragraphs.

Students saw gardening as a strategy to combat food insecurity. By growing it themselves, clients could produce food themselves and have access to it right in their own yards. They did not have to contend with barriers to obtain food that the poor often face (such as limited transportation, time, and money). One student I interviewed noted, "Even if their food bank supply is low, they have their own garden to rely on. I think that's really important."

Dr. Swauger told me that her students recognized that gardening creates a sense of self-empowerment. For example, when students shared their service experiences with classmates, they talked about how excited the clients were to take home seedlings and gardening supplies. She said they described how numerous clients showed pictures of their gardening successes from last year's Seedling Project to them. During an interview with one of the students, he told me that "gardening is something that can build their confidence."

In addition to fostering self-empowerment, students became aware that foods produced in a garden are typically nutritious and wholesome. This benefit ties closely to self-empowerment because students witnessed clients emanating pride for producing high quality foods through their own efforts. They shared photos and described in detail what they grew, such as "beautiful tomatoes", beans that "tasted so good", and descriptions of other vegetables. Students reflected

their awareness of wholesome homegrown foods in their comments like, "The food that they're growing is fresh and safe", and "…they know that they're getting real healthy foods. Because they are actually planting them and growing them themselves."

Another benefit that students realized about gardening was that it could strengthen family and community relationships. One of the students that I interviewed commented, "It's something that they can do with their children…a valuable experience in itself." A second interviewee said, "…passing those skills onto your kids, or being able to do something with your children even though you may not have a lot to give to them, you're able to do things like that." One of Dr. Swauger's students thought that gardening lessons should be included in the Sociology of Family course "because that is part of havin' a family", she said. A senior sociology student decided that after the Sociology of Family course ended, she would start a garden in her urban community and grow food to give to her neighbors. "It's a way to give back to my community," she said. Other students expressed a desire to start a community garden or a school garden.

Lastly, students thought that gardening activities generated psychological benefits. During our interviews, students told me that gardening "is something that can build their confidence", and "they get to get outdoors, they get to be connected with their environment." Students thought that gardening effectively relieves stress, and this view was reflected in their comments such as, "gardening is a great stress relief for these people", and "…people are living in high stress environments, so I think being able to do something that takes your mind off is a great thing."

Transformative Learning

There is evidence of transformative learning. Students described a shift in their preconceived assumptions about the poor, and some indicated a sense of dissonance. Dr.

Swauger noted that her students were quite surprised at how "clean and well-dressed clients were", that they were not all homeless, and that many of them were working. She said that others wrote that they would not assume that impoverished and working poor people are to blame for their predicament. Instead, data suggested that the students experienced an emerging awareness of empowerment of self and a desire to "do *something*," such as being involved in some kind of community outreach program. In reflecting upon their service experiences in the Seedling Project, several students recognized that their career path would include working to improve social equity in some way or another. One student in particular described how she would take on an activist role. Others said they that want to engage in civic activities such as starting a school garden, starting a community garden, volunteering at a food bank, and duplicating the Seedling Project at another university. Many of them said they wanted to participate in the Seedling Project again next year.

Summary

Through service learning the Seedling Project, students realized that food insecurity is a local and national problem. They understood how food insecurity links to poverty and how both can affect American families. Students took pride in their service work with the Seedling Project because they saw that food insecurity and hunger were important social issues, and they felt like their efforts were making a difference in the community. The fact that they were giving people the means to help themselves and not just providing a handout seemed to make their experiences positive, even joyous. They embraced opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, and these interactions helped to dissolve preconceived notions that they may have had about people of lower socioeconomic status, those who need public assistance, and those who contend with

59

long-term unemployment. Surprisingly, a number of students saw that gardening provided multiple benefits. Gardening is self-empowering; it is a way to increase access to food. In addition, it strengthens social relationships and produces positive psychological benefits. Furthermore, evidence suggests that some students had transformative experiences through service learning.

Community Outcomes

The data reflected outcomes for community organizations that are stakeholders in the Seedling Project. The Indiana Community Garden (ICG) played a role in each outcome. I will discuss two outcomes for the community. They include 1) the Indiana Community Garden implemented a food production and gleaning program and now provides fresh produce on a regular basis for patrons at the Zion food pantry, and 2) the community garden at the Chevy Chase Community Center was revitalized. I will then provide a short summary of the findings.

I must first mention a person named Eve, who performs significant roles in the two community outcomes that I identified. Eve's name will appear often throughout this section. She is one of the planners of the Seedling Project and is she coordinates activities between the Indiana Community Garden and the Seedling Project. Eve is a Master Gardener and a leading figure of the community garden; she is involved in almost every aspect of its functions. She is a key member of its planning committee, but she also performs many other roles for the garden; among them include writing grant proposals, coordinating community events, leading educational tours and activities, and organizing groups of students who come to the garden for service work opportunities.

Fresh Food Initiative

Almost since its inception in 2012, the Indiana Community Garden sought ways to address hunger related issues in Indiana County. In particular, it wanted to increase access to fresh produce for people who often could not afford to purchase these foods. At one point, nutritionists from IUP partnered with ICG in an attempt to develop a working relationship with ICCAP. The group offered to sponsor a garden plot for a family who was a client of ICCAP. In addition to providing seedlings, seeds, and tools, they also intended to provide gardening, cooking, and nutritional advice for the family. However, the initiative never came to fruition. Other efforts the community garden made to improve food access include: 1) maintaining food production in several garden plots and inviting the public to take what they need, 2) inviting troubled youths involved in a local support group to visit the garden where they learned that they could take food from the public beds, and 3) by hosting educational, family-friendly social events at the community garden. Although several people partook of small amounts of food from the public garden plots from time to time, the overall impact on increasing food access was small.

No new opportunities to achieve this objective materialized until 2014.However, in May 2014, as the Seedling Project's first seedling distribution at Zion food pantry was winding down, a discussion ensued between the food pantry staff and Eve. I was involved in the discussion as well. Eve proposed a plan whereby the community gardeners would bring fresh produce to the food pantry and give it away during the pantry's monthly food distributions. The food pantry staff gladly consented. Eve recalled later that:

> …in talking with them (food pantry workers) we could see that *this* (she really
>
> emphasized this word) was how we could get things into the food pantry. And

because of that, now we are really important to them. I wrote a letter of recommendation for a grant they needed. They needed a partner, and we were the only ones working with them at that time.

Eve and I drew up a plan for growing vegetables and herbs, and with the help of more garden volunteers, we began growing them in the large I-shaped garden bed (the "I-bed") at the community garden. Volunteers helped nurture the plants and they helped with harvesting and delivery. The foods are destined for the Zion food pantry, but as always, garden visitors are allowed to take what they need from this plot.

In addition to harvesting food in the I-bed, we gleaned food and cut flowers from private garden plots of the gardeners who were out of town, with their permission, and by asking master gardeners to donate their surplus homegrown produce. We harvested produce from the community garden in the early morning on food distribution days and delivered it straight to Zion food pantry. Often, the food was so fresh when it arrived there, the tomatoes were still wet with morning dew, and broccoli dripped water from the bottoms of the freshly cut stalks.

Foods that off-site gardeners donated were either delivered to the community garden in the early morning during harvesting time, or brought to Eve the evening before. I have observed Eve's refrigerator at her home stuffed full of produce donated by local gardeners. I recall seeing her garage cluttered with baskets and bags that were filled with squash, potatoes, and other assorted vegetables that local gardeners donated for food pantry patrons. Sometimes there was a table set up, and it was covered with any combination of cucumbers, bell peppers, tomatoes, beets, and more, waiting to be bagged for transport to the food pantry. On occasion, the table held huge glass jars crammed full with long-stemmed cut flowers in a riot of colors, fresh from local gardens.

The community garden's first fresh food donation occurred on June 9, 2014 during a regular bi-monthly food distribution. Zion food pantry provided tables and space for us to set up our baskets of fresh foods, and water-filled canning jars containing sprigs of herbs and cut flowers. Two six-foot-diameter tables were covered with assorted produce, herbs, flowers, and a stack of recipes. Our setup was near the center of the room, approximately 15 feet away from the tables that contained the monthly food allotments. Patrons entered the room to pick up their bags of food, and they would have to walk past our tables to exit the room.

During this and subsequent distributions, there were three to five community gardeners staffing the tables and handing out the foods to food pantry patrons. Patrons picked up their bags of food from one set of tables, and then they slowly approached the tables with the fresh produce. I recognized some of the individuals as clients from the Seedling Project. The first several times that we were set up at the food pantry, it seemed to me that quite a few of the patrons were wary of our presence. Nevertheless, people took most of the foods. Some vegetables, like kale and chard, were unfamiliar to many of them, and they were left over when the distribution ended. Towards the end of the summer, people were less hesitant to approach our tables and select some produce. We noticed that as time went on, more people were willing to try "something new", especially when we had recipes to provide as well. Community gardeners, myself included, gave out fresh produce at almost every food distribution from June until October that year.

In order to provide more food earlier in the season, the community garden began growing foods earlier in 2015 than it did in 2014. In May 2015, I and other garden volunteers were present again at Zion food pantry, providing fresh produce to patrons during bi-monthly food pantry distributions. By now, a solid relationship was forming between the food pantry staff and

63

Eve. She told me later, "Because of this (Seedling) project…this led to being very connected with the Zion food pantry, on a personal level, me being connected with it…"

Patrons no longer seemed suspicious of us. They recognized us and we recognized most of them, and a rapport developed amongst us. Some patrons told us about the successes they had with the plants and seeds they received in 2014 from the Seedling Project. They spoke with pride about such things as how big their tomatoes were, or how many beans their plants produced, or how tall and beautiful their sunflowers got, or that they had so many tomatoes they gave some away to their neighbors. Some patrons took photos of themselves ("selfies") standing next to their plants or a bowl of food they grew themselves, and they showed the images to others at the food pantry. One staff member recalled that "Several of them…would just pull out their cell phones and show us pictures of the plants…The people would just be beaming about what they'd done in their back yard." She further added:

> There's one gentleman who comes to mind each time; he was so delighted and so happy with how *tall* his tomato plants got and how *big* his tomatoes got. And he would show us, every time he came in, we would see several pictures of, "This is what they're doing now." And he would pose with his- he had some rather sizable tomatoes off his plant- he'd pose with them.

A few of the patrons sought gardening advice, and a couple of others wanted to chitchat about seed and plant varieties. They were older people who had gardened when they were younger. A worker at the Zion food pantry remarked that they "…maybe missed that and were happy to be able to do even a little bit of that yet again. And they were knowledgeable about what they were doing."

64

At this point, people were more willing to try new varieties of vegetables and herbs than they were in the past. I spoke with a worker at Zion food bank who said, "…the produce from the community garden; they *so* look forward to that, and you have experienced it. They're much more apt to come over to you and they're just more comfortable with it." Some would ask us if we brought a certain vegetable, and they began telling us which vegetables they particularly liked. They were interested in recipes and cooking advice that we had to offer. Sometimes we even filled three tables with produce, but the tables were always empty before the end of the two-hour distribution period. Eve estimated that the community garden's fresh food initiative provided approximately 1000 pounds of fresh produce (vegetables, herbs, and cut flowers) to patrons of the Zion food pantry in 2014, and in 2015 the initiative provided an additional 1200 pounds of produce.

Zion food pantry receives no federal or state funds, relying instead on private donations for financial support. It needed to apply for a grant. The grant application required a recommendation letter from a group that had collaborated with the food pantry. ICG filled the role as a collaborator, and Eve wrote the recommendation letter. The grant came through, providing much-needed funding for Zion food pantry. As of 2016, the food pantry continues to partner with ICG in providing fresh produce for its patrons. The pantry provides the facility and tables for ICG volunteers to present and give out the produce. Food pantry clients are more willing to take the foods and they are curious to try new varieties. Zion food pantry had wanted to provide fresh foods but did not have refrigeration units or space to store them. The Seedling Project brought IUP students to the Zion food pantry. It became a place where students obtained deep learning experiences through observing the inner workings of a food pantry and through interactions with its patrons and community members.

Revitalization of the Chevy Chase Community Garden

A second community outcome that arose from the Seedling Project was a major revitalization of the Chevy Chase Community Garden in 2015. Volunteers from Indiana Community Garden replenished and replanted the raised beds with fresh soil and seedlings that were left over from the final seedling distribution of the year. A local business donated fencing supplies, and volunteers from a local bank installed the new fence around the perimeter of the garden to keep wildlife out.

In 2013, the Chevy Chase Community Center, also known simply as "Chevy Chase", started up a community garden. The garden was constructed on a small hillside lot that was donated by Joni Malloy, a property owner in the community. The startup project was financed through a grant from the Starbucks Foundation. The garden is located on Alley 2 Road, exactly two blocks over from the community center, and can be seen from the back door of the community center. Student volunteers from Indiana County Technology Center built the garden's six raised garden beds entirely from solid 6 x 6 posts. Each garden bed measures approximately three feet wide by eight feet long by 18 inches tall. This community garden does not rent plots to individuals. It is tended by individuals and groups under the guidance of community center staff members, and the center oversees the maintenance and well-being of the garden. The food is intended to be used in the kitchen at the community center. Unfortunately, deer and rabbits quickly discovered the garden and visited it often as a regular source of food. The existing fence that had partially surrounded the garden was not adequate to keep wildlife out.

In 2013, I met with a director of the community center and offered to help with their community garden, but the center did not take up my offer. At that time, no relationship existed

between the staff at Chevy Chase and gardeners at the Indiana Community Garden, nor with master gardeners from the Indiana County office of Penn State Extension. I drove by the Chevy Chase Community Garden six times between 2013 and 2015; each time, the garden appeared to be in somewhat of a state of neglect, and I observed very few plants growing in the raised beds.

In 2015, I took part in a discussion with the planning committee of the Seedling Project. The discussion led to a consensus to invite Chevy Chase to collaborate in the Seedling Project. The new director of the community center accepted our invitation. The community center would be a locus for an additional seedling distribution, which took place on May 12, 2015. Several Chevy Chase staff members, along with students, volunteer master gardeners and ICG members, worked together in this seedling distribution, making it a truly collaborative effort. Numerous seedlings were left over from this distribution, and someone suggested that they should be planted in the Chevy Chase Community Garden. One week later, groups of volunteers convened at the garden.

More than 20 residents of the Chevy Chase community came and mowed the grass, cut down weeds and brush, and provided labor for other tasks needed such as moving bags of soils and planting the garden beds. ICG gardeners brought seedlings and bags of soil that were left over from the Seedling Project. Working together with the residents, they cultivated the soil in the raised beds, mixed in new bags of soil, and planted seedlings. The community center provided hot dogs and drinks for everyone. A gardener commented, "The beauty of it was that people from Chevy Chase who did the planting could feel proud of what they did." Residents and gardeners erected a small fence comprised of posts and hardware from their own yards and some purchased components. Eve recalled:

We got there about 10:15 and realized there's no fence around there, realized these plants are gonna be gone by morning. The critters, we saw bunnies hopping around. When we left that garden around 5 pm, we got every bit of supplies, of soil that we had left, we used remaining money… We used metal posts from our yard but we didn't have enough fencing to go around. The garden was going to be gone the next morning in our view if we didn't get a fence around it. So we used what little bit of money was left (from the Seedling Project) to get that up.

Later in the summer, as the garden produced foods, they were harvested and taken to the kitchen of the community center to be incorporated into hot meals. The meals were available to anyone, at no cost, on weekdays. The meal program continues to the present.

In 2015, Chevy Chase agreed again to host a seedling distribution at their community center. There were hundreds of seedlings and packets of seeds left over after the distribution ended. Some staff members of Chevy Chase took plants home to grow food that they could bring back to the community center's kitchen. Several staff workers at Chevy Chase discussed with Seedling Project planners about donating seedlings for their community garden again. One of planners said, "…I'm over there with the cook, and she's telling me what she would like in that garden….Until this project came along, there was no connection between ICG and Zion food pantry…there was no connection to Chevy Chase Community Center," and "They will get plants again this year…they see us as a partner." On June 4, as they had done in 2015, ICG volunteers hauled plants and soil to the Chevy Chase Community Garden. They formed a workforce with volunteers from C & T Bank to mow the grounds, install fencing, refill and replant the raised beds.

In the past, the Chevy Chase community was sometimes referred to as "the forgotten community" because it was often overlooked by some community-building and social equity initiatives. The Seedling Project brought IUP students to the Chevy Chase Community Center. Similar to the Zion food pantry, the community center became a place where students acquired deep learning experiences by observing how a community kitchen serves people in need, and through their interactions with community members. Through the collaborative efforts of students, master gardeners, and members of Chevy Chase and ICG, low-income residents received seedlings and gardening supplies. The garden was revitalized and replanted, and structural improvements were made. The garden produced foods that are used in the community center's kitchen to create nutritious, no-cost meals for people, including homeless people, who come there for what is often their only meal of the day.

Collaboration in the Seedling Project brought about new relationships in the Indiana community. Since its beginning in 2012, the Indiana Community Garden looked for a way to make an impact in the community on food related social justice issues. Through interfacing with the Zion food pantry and the Chevy Chase Community Center during the Seedling Project, ICG accomplished its long-sought-after goal. Each of the three organizations met the needs other in their collective mission to provide people with nutritious, fresh food.

The people who are benefitting from these new initiatives have had difficulty accessing fresh food and must rely on food pantries, free meals at community centers, and federal and state assistance programs such as SNAP in attempts to meet their normal caloric and nutritional needs. Patrons of the Zion food pantry and the Indiana Community

Center are enjoying a health-promoting activity and they look forward to next year's
seedling distributions from the Seedling Project.

In this chapter, I presented my findings that are based on data I collected through
one-on-one interviews with individuals who were involved with the Seedling Project, and
my own personal observations while I was involved with the Seedling Project. I collected
data to identify outcomes that the Seedling Project generated for students who were
involved, and outcomes that resulted for the community. I identified the following
outcomes:

- Students gained in-depth understanding of food insecurity and poverty in
  the Indiana community

- Students gained cross-cultural experiences

- Students saw multiple benefits in gardening

- Students had transformative learning experiences

- The Indiana Community Garden increased access to fresh food for
  residents of Indiana County, thus achieving a long-sought goal

- The Chevy Chase Community Garden was revitalized

In the following chapter, I will discuss each outcome in greater detail. I will
confer limitations to this study, and I will offer suggestions for further research that can
build from the findings of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The Seedling Project is a coalition of community-based organizations and a Sociology of

Family course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The project provides local food pantry

clients with seedlings and supplies so they can produce their own food, while also providing

students with rich service learning experiences. The research questions of this study are:

What outcomes do community partners perceive from participating in the Seedling Project?

What outcomes do IUP services learning students perceive from participating in the Seedling

Project?

This chapter contains my analysis of the findings of my research that I presented in

Chapter Four. During my analysis, I will relate my research findings to relevant existing studies.

This discussion first explores how my research addresses my first research question, which is,

how were IUP students affected by their service learning experiences with the Seedling Project?

My research addresses four outcomes for the students. I discuss my findings for each of the four

outcomes. My discussion then turns to my second research question, which is, how did the

Seedling Project affect the Indiana community? I identified two outcomes for the Indiana

community. My analysis discusses each of these outcomes.

Following my analysis of my research findings, I will present what I believe were

limitations to my study. After I discuss limitations of this study, I will make suggestions for

future research that could expand upon the findings of this study.

Student Outcomes

I analyzed data seeking answers to the question, "What outcomes do IUP services

learning students perceive from participating in the Seedling Project?" I found four outcomes for

students: understanding of food insecurity and poverty in Indiana County, cross-cultural

experiences, perception that gardening fosters self-empowerment and other benefits, and

transformative learning. Each of these outcomes can be seen to interrelate with one another. I

will explain further in the discussion that follows.

Understanding of Food Insecurity and Poverty

A number of students gained an understanding of how food insecurity affects families

and how it relates to poverty. It is possible that a couple of students may have already understood

the concept of food insecurity- or had even experienced it themselves- prior to their service

learning experiences in the Seedling Project. In class, students learned about how social systems

and structures perpetuate oppression and disadvantage. When their classroom lessons and

reading assignments combined with their service work, students' comments indicate that they

understood the tangible, real consequences of the problems that they only read about and talked

about in class. This finding is consistent with John Dewey's (1938) theory that experiential and

classroom learning together produce deep understanding and rich learning experiences. They felt

that the problem of food insecurity is worse than many people realize. Perhaps this perception

indicates a new, emerging awareness in the students of food insecurity and poverty as real

problems in their own community and across the nation. This relates to Mezirow's theory of

meaning perspectives. According to Meziro (1990), meaning perspectives "refer to the structure

of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past

experience during the process of interpretation." (p#) Students realized how multiple dimensions

of social inequality affect individuals and families. In the classroom, they learned that in order to

minimize costs such as babysitters, meals on-the-go, gasoline, and auto maintenance, people with

limited resources often organize all of their errands into one daylong trip. At the food pantry,

students noticed how patrons came and left the food pantry quickly (unless it was a seedling distribution day.)

Another factor of food insecurity students studied in class in class was that foods that are energy-dense, nutritionally poor and highly processed foods are often the only diet options that low-income people can afford. During their service work, students observed these kinds of foods sitting on the shelves at the food pantry. The staff person who kept the storeroom organized said, "We hafta stock stuff that doesn't go bad. We don't like it. We do the best we can." Students noticed that a number of food pantry patrons were obese. An understanding of why the food pantry provides these kinds of foods, and seeing them on the food pantry's shelves reinforced their understanding of how food insecurity and poverty can contribute to some people becoming obese through no fault of their own. These observances, reinforced with facts taught in the classroom, helped break down stereotypes that students may have had about obese people or people who struggle with low incomes. Other studies have shown similar findings (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013; Grossman, Sherard, Prohn, Bradley, Goodell, & Andrew, 2012; Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008). Further reflection might help students make the same association to other groups of people who have similar underlying struggles that the more privileged may be unaware of.

Cross-Cultural Experiences

Cross-cultural experiences with food pantry patrons helped students understand how larger social forces and conditions affect people, and how people respond to these forces and conditions. For example, clients often arrived at the food pantry in small groups. Often, they will carpool as a strategy to minimize transportation costs. Or, a social service agency might provide transportation to other groups. Students made numerous comments that indicated their

73

interactions with food pantry clients and staff helped gave them a deeper understanding of food

insecurity and poverty in Indiana County. Mooney and Edwards (2001) argue that one of the

benefits gained from service learning is the ability to grasp and apply abstract ideas that they

learn in the classroom. In this case, the abstract nature of a national social problem such as food

insecurity and hunger gained relevance when students met and listened to the stories of real

people who cope with problems that students read and hear about in the classroom. As students

interacted with these individuals, they transformed these concepts into real-life perspectives.

Oral stories and opinions of the impoverished and working poor helped remove food insecurity's

veil of invisibility from the students.

Data from student interviews, my interview with Dr. Swauger, plus my observations in

Dr. Swauger's class, at Zion food pantry and Chevy Chase Community Center suggest that

students developed cross-cultural acceptance. They realized that food pantry clients respond to

and deal with common life issues by using the resources that they have readily available to them.

For example, in one class I observed, students learned that although everyone wants to eat

healthy, some individuals are unable to make healthy food choices because they do not have

adequate resources or access. Through their service work, students could discern that many

clients of the Seedling Project did not have the means to purchase fresh food on a consistent

basis. Interactions with clients helped students break through stereotyped assumptions that can

hinder full understanding of concepts; for example, it might be easy for some to assume that a

patron of a food pantry is playing the system if he drives an expensive, late-model automobile,

but in reality, s/he could be in dire financial straits from loss of employment. Lack of money and

transportation resources are two consistent shortfalls that low-income people struggle with,

necessitating them to turn to food pantries for food. Cross-cultural experiences gave students

opportunities for comparative analyses of what they thought they knew (stereotyped characters) with new knowledge (people in real life). This finding relates to similar findings in a study by Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, and Miller (2015). In a service learning project, students in who interacted with others of another social class learned what it was like to be a member of that social class. Students' interactions with individuals from different social sectors contributed to their understanding of how social and economic conditions shape different perspectives and influence activities. In a diverse society, understanding why others are different and accepting them along with their differences strengthens collaborations, communities, and societies. One student said that interacting with clients helped him understand many of the strengths the clients possess and the struggles that they face.

In the classroom, students learned that fresh food is often too expensive for low-income household budgets. History provides numerous examples that show how gardening improved household food security (Gray, Guzman, Glowa, & Drevno, 2014; Lawson, 2005; Mortimer, 2007). Gardening at home does not require transportation and it affords instant access to high quality food without draining household financial resources. Students learned that if individuals have the resources they need, they will take proactive measures to improve their life situation.

Clients' enthusiasm and gratitude for receiving the seedlings validated students' beliefs that they were helping clients improve their household food security, experience a sense of self-empowerment. Many students said they felt happiness and satisfaction through their participation in the Seedling Project, and they recalled feeling similar emotions when they observed clients' excitement as they received seedlings and buckets of soil. Rather than seeing clients as passive subjects, perhaps students saw that their efforts were fortifying clients' sense of agency, instead of contributing to a state of dependency. Aftandilian and Dart's study (2013) of a service

learning project notes that the instructors were mindful to "redistribute power to community members" (p. 65). They empowered their clients to grow their own food instead of merely providing a handout to them. In this way, the project addressed some of the underlying issues that limit people's access to fresh food.

Dr. Swauger confirmed my findings from data in my student interviews when she said that her students were amazed at how excited clients were just to be able to plant and grow their own vegetables. Some clients showed pictures of their gardens from the previous year to students and they spoke with pride as they shared stories about their gardening successes. Students interpreted the joyous expressions of the clients as feeling empowered by their gardening successes. Mezirow (2000) stresses the importance of understanding what others are communicating as an important part of learning. Through their observations and interactions, students enhanced their cultural competence. Cultural competence is a sum of activities and perspectives that a person possesses that enable her or him to work successfully in cross-cultural settings (Danso, 2015). Dr. Swauger noted that her students observed how a client was overjoyed to be able to grow her own vegetables because it enabled her to continue to make proactive choices in her diet and continue to lose weight. The findings reinforce Aftandilian and Dart's (2013) claim that gardening cultivates self-esteem.

As I mentioned previously in Chapter Four, students realized that gardening produces nutritious food and that the food supplied by food pantries is seldom fresh and wholesome. Moreover, low-income people often must purchase low-cost, unhealthy processed foods in order to stretch their food dollars. Students thought that the freshness of the garden foods would make them seem more valuable, especially so for people who cannot afford to buy it. This finding parallels Mecham and Joiner's (2012) findings in their study of college students' perceptions of

gardening. In realizing value of gardening as a fundamental life skill that can help a family's food situation through hard times, perhaps at some future point students may take up gardening when they have families of their own.

Research literature indicates that greater social ties improve food security. For example, a cross-sectional study by Martin, Rogers, Cook, and Joseph (2004) showed that social capital improves food security and "is associated with lower odds of hunger" (p. 2653), while Dean and Sharkey's study (2011) found that people with less social capital were more likely to experience food insecurity. Realizing that gardening has the capacity for community building and wanting to make a difference, one of the students in Dr. Swauger's class said that she wanted to start up a community garden in her hometown to help strengthen her community. For the students who expressed a desire to start up a school or community garden, their observations of gardening's positive psychological effects on the clients may have contributed to their decision to do so.

Students mentioned that gardening is a productive and healthful activity that parents can do with their children. Families strengthen familial bonds among one another when they share activities together such as gardening. One way to share family knowledge is by working together in a garden (Allen, 2012). When the children grow up and have families of their own, they can continue practicing these activities with their children. Thus, students' awareness of gardening's capacity to fortify family ties provides the opportunity to understand how culture change happens.

Transformative Learning

My data suggests that some students experienced at least partial transformative learning, which can be seen as important first steps toward transformation. One student I interviewed recalled that she was emotionally moved to the point of weeping after she listened to several

77

impoverished clients talk about the struggles they face in providing food for their households. She wanted to do something in her community to make an impact on food insecurity. She decided to start an urban garden after the school year ended as a way to give back to her community. Other students may have had fully transformative learning experiences. In my interview with Dr. Swauger, I learned that one student changed her career plans. Through reflecting about her service learning experiences, she realized her that values and interests paralleled with organizations that strive to improve social equity and equality. She decided that her career would involve working to empower disenfranchised groups of people. Porter, Summers, Toton, and Aisenstein (2008) posit that when students understand the needs of the community and they work to fulfill the needs, through their participation and reflection they begin to see that they can become agents of social change.

Summary

Students' service learning experiences increased their understanding and awareness of food insecurity and poverty. Cross-cultural experiences enriched their understanding of food insecurity and poverty, helped dissolve stereotypes, and enhanced cultural competency skills. Cross-cultural experiences played a part in the other outcomes. The concepts that students learned about in class discussions and assigned readings came to life when they spent time at the food pantry and interacted with clients and community volunteers. While the clients spent time with and talked to students, they imparted to students their perceptions of the worth of the food they grew. They emanated their sense of accomplishment and pride in producing food that, in their minds, was beautiful enough to photograph and even include in "selfies." Through their observations of others, students interpreted gardening as empowering and as an effective strategy to improve food security. It also appears that at least some of the students had transformative

learning experiences, as indicated by comments that range from weeping after listening to clients' stories to making a change in their career plans.

Fresh Food Initiative

The Indiana Community Garden (ICG) fulfilled its long-sought objective of getting fresh food to people in the community, especially for those in food-insecure households. This food initiative began to form in 2014. During food and seedling distributions at Zion food pantry, Dr. Swauger's students and the planners of the Seedling Project observed that the bags of food the patrons took home from the food pantry did not include fresh fruits or vegetables. They also noticed that the clients were enthusiastic and thankful when they received seedlings and seeds at the distributions; they embraced the opportunity to grow their own food. Eve approached the food pantry staff and asked if ICG could bring in some produce for the patrons, and a collaborative undertaking developed from there. Each organization provided resources that the other lacked; the food pantry provided the facility and tables, and ICG provided the food and people to distribute it. Thus, the community garden now provides low-income people with fresh produce during every monthly food distribution at Zion food pantry, from March until November each year.

Symbolic interactionism posits that social organization needs shared meanings for people to join forces together (Kivisto, 2013). Stakeholders in the Seedling Project shared similar meanings for fresh food in terms of equitable food access for low-income families and individuals. Alliances between community-based organizations increase the capabilities of each organization beyond what either one could accomplish on its own. ICG had the capacity to produce food, but it lacked the place where food, and the people who needed it, would come together. Zion provided that place. The staff of the Zion food pantry wanted to provide fresh

foods but they were well aware of the limitations of their facility. The food it provided may not have been the healthiest, but it was typical of what patrons could expect to receive from a food pantry. ICG provided the food.

Going forward, students could learn how grassroots associations like the Seedling Project foster community building on the local level through spinoff projects such as the food project involving ICG and the Zion food pantry. Such study would bring to light how community-based coalitions are able to identify creative solutions to address social problems within the communities that they operate in. This knowledge would be particularly valuable for students in the social sciences and for those who want to continue and expand their civic engagement.

ICG grows vegetables, herbs and flowers in several raised garden beds to bring to these food distributions. Pre-school and school-age children, and college students come to the community garden for educational activities and to fulfill volunteer community service commitments. The garden beds that produce food for the food pantry often serve to generate awareness in garden visitors about the need for equitable food access in the community as well as being an outdoor lab for learning about gardening. As another ripple effect of the Seedling Project, ICG helped the food pantry acquire funding through securing a grant. In applying for the grant, the application required a collaborating partner and a letter of recommendation. ICG fulfilled these criteria of the application process, as the food pantry and ICG worked together first in the Seedling Project, and then during the growing season providing fresh food for patrons. Prior to this alliance, the food pantry had no collaborating partners. Perhaps the Seedling Project has influenced the startup of other food justice-oriented projects that produce positive outcomes for individuals in the periphery; if there are, the outcomes are going unrecognized.

Porter, Summers, Toton, and Aisenstein (2008) acknowledge that these kinds of collaborative projects often produce unexpected positive outcomes.

Revitalization of the Chevy Chase Community Garden

As I discussed earlier in Chapter Four, the Chevy Chase Community Garden was started in 2012 on a plot of land that was donated by a neighborhood resident. At that time, the garden was tended by staff members of Chevy Chase, and it did not receive help from ICG or the local office of Penn State Extension. Food that the garden produced was intended to be used in meals prepared and served at the community center. However, the garden fell into a state of neglect. In 2015, the last seedling distribution for the year was taking place at the community center. The distribution went very well, and a number of individuals who came only for the center's daily free lunch ended up taking home plants and supplies too. Two of the staff members of the community center assisted during the seedling distribution. Staff members of the community center who had seemed slightly apprehensive about allowing a seedling distribution to take place now appeared relaxed and happy. When one organization comes to another's space to "do good" the host organization may harbor a sense of vulnerability and apprehension. We were mindful to conduct ourselves on their terms; that is, we asked for clarification before we acted. By asking explicitly for clarification about actions , we were implicitly asking for permission to act. For example, we asked where to get things we needed and where to put things when we were done, and we were interested about the center's lunch program and the people that it serves. And, we opened up about ourselves. In this way, we were expressing implicitly that we were not attempting "to take over" or "be their saviors." This mindfulness is consistent with Danso, Stokamer, & Kaufman's (2015) description of critical reciprocity. We were mindful of what we said and how we presented ourselves in order to prevent any perception of a power differential.

As a result, friendliness blossomed between the community center staff and those of us conducting the seedling distribution.

As the distribution was winding down, it was collectively decided to donate leftover plants, soil and seeds to the Chevy Chase Community Garden. The community center mailed flyers out to residents in the neighborhood to ask for their help resurrecting the community garden- "*their* community garden", said Tina, a board member of the Chevy Chase Community Action Council (CCAC). On the day of the garden resurrection, master gardeners from ICG arrived at the garden with tools, soil, plants, and seeds, and more than 20 local residents showed up to help out with "their" community garden. "That's a *huge* number," said Tina. The community center cooked hot dogs and served drinks. Residents and gardeners worked all day mowing, trimming, planting, and installing fence.

Research studies show that community gardens have a tremendous capacity for building social capital. Prior to holding a seedling distribution at the Chevy Chase community center, the CCCC did not have any relationships with gardening-affiliated organizations in the Indiana community. Firth, Maye, and Pearson (2011) identifies this kind of developing alliance as "bridging social capital" (p. 558). Bridging social capital connects social groups together through the relationships form with key people of the groups. The mutually beneficial alliance that formed between Chevy Chase and ICG supports studies that show gardening brings people together and strengthens social connections (Myers, 1998; Ohmer, Meadowcroft, Freed, & Lewis, 2009). Tina said that the Chevy Chase community garden "has been a catalyst for community involvement." Lawson (2005) argues that community gardens can "bring people together who might not otherwise interact" (p. 296) and make connections to other organizations in the community. The American Community Gardening Association recognizes that

community gardens spur community development and social connectivity (American

Community Gardening Association, n.d.).

<div align="center">**Limitations of Study**</div>

Although I put forth my best efforts as a researcher, there were several limitations to this

study. One limitation is that I conducted this study within a short time frame. The sample size of

clients and students was quite small and was not complete to the point of saturation. In addition,

if there had been more time to conduct the study, I might have been able to re-interview some

informants to obtain more, richer, and thicker data.

My interviews with clients and students probably did not elicit as much data as they

could have. Telephone interviews can be problematic in terms of data collection. Interviews tend

to be shorter, it can be a challenge to establish rapport, and the interviewer will be unable to see

non-verbal cues of the informant (Clifford, n.d.). Such was the case in my telephone interviews

with students. Some may have felt awkward or reserved about explaining their thoughts and

experiences to me over the phone. Even though the students probably remembered who I was,

they did not know me well. That fact probably contributed to reservation over an in-depth phone

conversation with someone who was not a peer.

Although I interviewed three clients, I did not study their experiences and their perceived

outcomes from the Seedling Project. I needed more time for analysis of these findings than the

time frame of my study could afford. Data from the interviews with clients are rather thin. As I

mentioned earlier, some of the clients seemed as if they did not have 100 percent mental acuity at

the time of interviewing. This could have been due to the effects of prescription medications, or

some other reason unknown to me; or it could simply have been a feature of their normal

personality. I am an inexperienced researcher, but I care deeply about the emotional welfare of

<div align="center">83</div>

my interviewees. I was extremely careful during interviews to foster relaxation and trust in them. I did not ask a lot of probing questions for deeper responses because I was unsure if my inexperience as an interviewer would cause some kind of discomfort in the client by doing so. My experiences in this study as an interviewer demonstrate that I need to further develop my interviewing skills.

Another limitation of this study was that I did not include students' reflective essays or journals as part of my data collection. When I was forming my research proposal, I did not have the foresight to take steps to obtain the required IRB approval to include the writings in my study. Deep reflection is a main tenet of experiential learning. The students' reflective essays likely contained much thick, richly detailed data about their changing or transforming perspectives.

Transferability

Transferability is a concept that refers to a researcher's explanation of how his/her study's findings could be applicable in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My study can be useful for others who may consider replicating a service learning program with their local community. First, planning and fundraising efforts should begin early, such as at the start of the semester prior to the semester of the service learning course. We found that regular, weekly meetings are necessary for maintaining clear lines of communication and for keeping everything on task and on time. They provide opportunities to make adjustments in the planning process, such as reassigning tasks to maintain an equitable distribution of work. Meetings are valuable for realigning goals toward the needs of student learning experiences, the needs of clients, and the need of community partners. Maintaining a balance of the diverse levels of expertise, interests, and needs of committee members can be challenging and necessitates a need to meet often.

Meetings serve well for updating all parties on rapidly changing developments in the project. Data that changes rapidly, such as funding information, should be readily available as well. We learned that Google Docs provides an ideal platform for access to fluctuating information in real time, and it allows members to update information within a document as needed.

The Seedling Project addresses important issues that are of timely and relevant sociological interest. This project served as inspiration and model for development of similar learning initiatives such as hunger on campus, and starting up a food pantry on campus for students. Students from numerous academic departments and student organizations volunteered to work in the Seedling Project. A similar service learning program could provide opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborative efforts. In addition to this study, another study that examines hunger issues is underway by another graduate student. This suggests that service learning programs, which focus on food insecurity, can be an interesting topic for engaging students in research.

Future Research

Future research should explore unintended outcomes in the community, or ripple effects, which can stem from service learning projects. As I mentioned earlier, this is an area of the literature that is not widely studied. A study of planning processes and collaborative activities that produce and maintain projects like the Seedling Project would be worthwhile. Future research could focus exclusively on experiences and outcomes for the clients of the Seedling Project.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Students

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Seedling Project?

2. Is this the first time you have participated in community service like the Seedling Project?

3. Tell me about the service learning part of your course.

   Probe: How many hours did you work in the project? What types of work did you do? What training did you receive in preparation for your service work?

4. What were some of your most memorable moments (good or bad) of your service learning experience?

   Probe: Why was that significant to you?

5. What did you like the most about your service learning experience in the Seedling Project?

6. What did you dislike the most about your service learning experience in the Seedling Project?

7. How has your experience in the Seedling Project service learning experience affected you, academically and personally?

8. What are your thoughts about participating in similar community service in the future?

   Probe: How has your involvement in the Seedling Project affected those views?

9. What did you learn from your service learning experience in the Seedling Project?

   Probes: What kinds of things did you do to help you connect what you learned in class to your learning experiences? What connections did you make between what you learned in class and your service learning experience? What did you reflect on? How did your reflections affect how you performed your service? How did your reflections enhance your classroom learning?

10. How did reflection on your service experiences affect your understanding of the course content?

Interview Guide for Students (continued)

11. How could the Seedling Project be improved to enhance students' service learning

experiences?

12. What recommendations would you make to the planners/organizers of the Seedling Project?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Clients

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Seedling Project?

2. Did your seedlings grow up and produce food? If so, what kind?

3. What was good about the Seedling Project?

4. What was bad about the Seedling Project?

5. What suggestions would you make to make the Seedling Project better?

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Seedling Project Planners/Organizers

1. What was your role in the Seedling Project?

   Probe: What were your duties?

   Describe any changes in your role.

2. Why did you decide to participate in the planning and organizing of the Seedling Project?

3. How has this service learning project affected you?

4. In your opinion, what worked well in the planning?

5. In your opinion, what did not go well in the planning?

6. The individuals in the planning group for the Seedling Project all represented different

   organizations. Each had different needs, different perspectives on poverty and hunger, and

   each came from different walks of life. How did you collaborate with a group having such

   diverse qualities?

   Probe: Tell me how the diversity of the group was an asset. Tell me how the diversity of the

   group presented challenges.

7. Please describe any evidence you saw of students benefitting from the Seedling Project.

8. Please describe any evidence you saw of clients benefitting from the Seedling Project.

9. Describe for me evidence of a strengthening of relationships, the worsening of relationships,

   or the formation of a new relationship, between the university and the community.

10. Did you see evidence of students benefitting in some way from their service learning? If so,

   in what way?

11. How could the planning activities be improved?

12. How could the Seedling Project be improved?

Interview Guide for Seedling Project Planners/Organizers (continued)

In addition to above questions, the following questions are for **faculty** (they are also planners):

1. Why did you decide to offer students this service learning experience?

2. What were your goals for the Seedling Project part of your course?

3. How did you make connections for your students between course content and service learning experiences?

4. How did you incorporate reflection into the course?

5. Describe any unexpected or unintended outcomes, both positive and negative.

6. Please describe for me examples of evidence that students were changed or affected by their service work in the Seedling Project.

   Probe: In what ways were they changed or affected by their service work?

Appendix D

Interview Guide for Community Organization Directors

1. What were your expectations of the students?

2. What were your expectations of the university?

3. What did the students learn at your organization?

4. How were your clients affected by the Seedling Project?

5. How was your organization affected by the Seedling Project?

6. Please describe any evidence you saw of any change in the relationship between the university

and the community as a result of the Seedling Project.