

RIPL 2021

Small Group Activity for: “Nothing for us, without us: Getting Started with Community Engagement and Culturally-Responsive Evaluation”

Instructions: Now that you’ve had a chance to learn about culturally-responsive evaluation and to think about community engagement, in our small groups, we will discuss the scenario. Below, I have attached a few questions to help you in your discussion.

Here is a reminder of our themes for the live session:

- Work with your team to develop a **race equity lens** with will help you think about how your community got to where it is, and what historical and contemporary factors need to be addressed to help create more equitable engagements with your community partners.
- Meet your community partners at the **intersections** at which they live—how does the experience of history, trust, culture, employment, housing, health, etc. influence how they experience your programming?
- Develop a **culturally-responsive, race equity evaluation** planning process that allows you opportunities to partner with community members, honor different ways of knowing, creatively explores ways to collect and disseminate findings.

The Scenario: “Superheroes Among Us”

Marimba is a mid-sized city in the Heartland. Historically, it was a city with several manufacturing plants, but many of those industries have relocated. The city is in the middle of the “Silicon Prairie”, has seen a recent influx of young families, because of the opening of several smaller tech start-ups. As the old factories become high-rise condos and art galleries, and as the new Marimba Entertainment District opens downtown, the adult children of the old factory workers find themselves working in very different kinds of jobs than their parents.

While the crops have changed somewhat, there still exists a neighboring more rural community about a half an hour outside of the city. This rural community is a mix of Amish families, non-native English-speaking families (with the first languages being primarily Spanish, Vietnamese, or Amharic).

Some of the adult children of former farming families are also coming to the city, trying their luck with stands at the Farmer’s Market, and opening farm-to-table food trucks to feed the hungry masses.

There are roughly 5,000 students enrolled in Marimba public high schools. (There is another approximate 1,000 students in private or parochial schools.) In the public schools, fifty percent of the students identify as White; fifteen percent identify as Black/African American; fifteen percent identify as Asian/Pacific Islander; seven percent identify as Native American/Alaska

Native; and the rest identified as Mixed Race/Other. Among these students, approximately twenty percent identify also as Hispanic (of any race). Approximately half of the students in the district are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

In a recent school district meeting, the superintendent announced that a local non-profit was funding a number of arts projects around the community, to offer students an opportunity to express themselves, and to allow the students to learn about healthcare careers. For the pilot a small group of science and arts teachers are recruited to have their classes participate in the pilot. For the pilot, students are asked to work in pairs to do three things: 1. Interview a healthcare hero in the community; 2. Draw a picture of that hero at work; 3. Write a brief bio of the hero.

The local libraries, which have long been the site for homework clubs, arts clubs, and workforce development workshops, are going to partner with the teachers to offer a “Hero Lab”, where local artists will be available to help the student teams draw and write up their bios. During the months of the project, information about healthcare careers will be prominently displayed at school and in the libraries. The pictures and bios will be available on the library website; and during National Public Health Week, a select number of hero-student teams will be featured at each library during a (post-COVID) celebration. The teachers and local artists are being given honoraria for their time; and the libraries are being given small stipends.

Last week, there was a meeting with several stakeholders for your library. Here are some of their quotes.

Siobhan Nelson, Director of your library: “With everything going on, I am glad we can offer this program to highlight health careers. I know we’ve had some science clubs in here, so I bet those kids will like it. And, I know there’s a group from the Honor Society that would love to do this—aren’t some of them pre-med anyway?”. Let’s reach out to those kids; I bet we can get them here. We will have an amazing turnout, and I bet the parents will give us good reviews!”

Brian Feinstein-Gomez, language arts teacher at the high school: “I like the idea of encouraging folks to look at heroes, but I am worried that we are not including those other kinds of frontline folks. A lot of my kids have family members who work in the poultry processing plant, or are line cooks in restaurants, or drive buses around town. Is it possible to tell the story of these more working class/working poor folk? Many of them are also non-native English speakers. I worry that my students won’t see themselves in this project. Are you reaching out to those kids and their families?”

Ayanna Littlejohn, School Board member and mom of a middle school child: “I am really excited about letting kids see health care heroes. My son, Jamal, wants to be a doctor when he grows up and I think he’d love to hear more about what that life is like. Also, I think it’s important to highlight STEM in our schools. The last report card at the high school showed that some of the marginalized populations were not enrolling in the more difficult science and math

classes. I think many of them cited not being sure what they'd use Chemistry or Physics for? And, since there's only Quick Clinic around here, I could see why they'd be confused."

Selam Kebede, a mother from the community, with her daughter, Eshe, sometimes translating: "My husband was a doctor back home in Ethiopia. Here, he is the manager at vitamin store while he works on his computer science degree. Here, in America, all of my children have seen nothing but disrespect by Americans of their father, a doctor, because he has an accent, because he is Black. In our community, at the Islamic Center, he is treated well because people know he has healing hands and has delivered babies. But once he walks out of that door, you Americans are so rude. Why should my children aspire to such a career here? Why should they waste their time on these things?"

Jacob Gerber, a father from the community, who works with his brothers to bring their produce to the local farmer's market: "Agreed, Selam, I don't know why my Alexander should waste time art and medical careers. My daddy had to have surgery on his back, after years of working the land, and it broke him. Him and Mama were never the same. My wife has needed a tooth pulled for three months, and we *still* can't afford it after she lost some of her hours as a bus driver. I ain't sending my kid to some workshop for rich snobby kids whose parents are gonna pay for them to go to medical school. Teach my kid something useful, like how to get those bill collectors from the doctor's office off your back!"

The Small Group Assignment: After the Meeting

Whew! That meeting was quite a doozy! It seems like lots of folks have opinions about the project. Your director has asked you how to move forward. She, and the funders, are very interested in getting high turnout. They are also interested in getting an economically-, linguistically-, ethnically-, and racially-diverse group of high schoolers involved.

In your small groups, explore these three questions:

1. It appears as if the library needs to find ways to help families feel included. What might be some ways, in the planning stage of the project, might be useful for the Planning Committee to better understand the concerns and questions of the families?
2. The Director has been told she needs to do some evaluation and tracking of the progress of the program along the way. What might be some meaningful outcomes to measure here, for the library, the school, and the families in the community? Are there possible ways to be culturally responsive and collect data on those outcomes?
3. The funder is suggesting an end-of-program celebration, to show some of the bios/pictures, but they are pretty flexible about what that looks like from site to site. How might we infuse some cultural responsiveness and community engagement into this celebration? Are there possibilities for evaluation activities here?