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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE:
AN INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT FIELD

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Abstract

Social change processes are dynamic and occur simultaneously on a variety of scales. The community development arena acts as a mid-level incubator for localized change, with community development practitioners from nonprofit, government, and academic organizations filling the role of change agent in diverse social and political contexts. The purpose of this study is to examine the community development professional's role in creating positive social change, and to identify factors that enable or prohibit such change, including elements of professional practice, in order to better understand how change happens on the ground and how these processes compare to formal theories of social and institutional change. Practitioners were selected from community development organizations in Lancaster and State College, Pennsylvania for the purpose of conducting key informant interviews to collect information about practitioner experiences and relationship to change in their own work. These interviews were transcribed, analyzed by way of constant comparison for emergent themes, and finally examined through the lens of four theories of institutional change. The findings of this study provide insight into a community development professional's role in creating change as a facilitator or enabler of change, and identify common enabling factors to the change process, including strong relationships, trust, credibility of a development organization, and an ability to utilize local leadership to direct and sustain development efforts. Barriers to localized change processes include a lack of diversity in development organizations as well as change-resistant power structures and socialized power. Key elements of personal practice such as valuing local knowledge, active listening, and empathy were also found to be contributing factors to a practitioner's ability to successfully engage in change processes. These findings provide useful insight for community development organizations and practitioners about how to more effectively engage with community contexts to produce meaningful, sustainable social change.

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Preface

I believe that one person can make a difference, and to that end, I became a Community, Environment, and Development major with the mindset that I was going to “change the world.” Over the last four years, this mindset has been continuously challenged as the cynicism and barriers of the “real world” become more and more evident. A task that once seemed so reasonable became unthinkable, until I thought about it differently. Through an exploration of the CED curriculum and engagement with this thesis, I’ve reworked and rescaled my own conceptualization of what it means to “change the world,” and thus, renewed my own faith and drive to be that change.

This project was inspired by realizations about power. Specifically, the idea that power is multidimensional and mobilized in insidious ways caused me to question the extent to which an individual can make change in the face of wicked problems. After a semester spent pouring over Schmid (2004), Gaventa (1980), and Peet (2007), I was disenchanted and thoroughly perturbed. Cumulatively, these texts describe the institutional nature of concentrated power, and suggest that in addition to being leveraged for nefarious purposes, power can also manifest in the banal conversations and actions that permeate communities and households everyday. I began to recognize how the interdependencies between the overt and the banal mobilizations of power reinforce the difficulty (and thus, the necessity) of empowering communities and individuals that exist outside the concentrated core of power elite. As I continued to draw these connections, it became clear that I, a future community development professional, will inevitably encounter and seek to change social phenomena that are deeply entrenched in institutional inequity driven by power politics on a variety of scales. At best, addressing these issues seemed hard. At worst, impossible.

To compound this frustration, I found that the theories of institutional change that I was presented with seemed inadequate for explaining the realities of social change processes in practice. I questioned how these theories were reflected in change

initiatives on the ground, particularly in the community development field, where practitioners constantly operate in unique, dynamic social and political contexts. As these topics percolated, my guiding questions formed. How can an individual practitioner make change in the face of such substantial wicked problems, and how can theory and practice be best integrated to represent an effective localized change process?

Throughout the process of collecting data for this project, I was given the chance to meet and speak with many professionals from a myriad of organizations that deal with development *in* community (efforts that seek to increase material well-being, such as economic development or infrastructure improvements) and development *of* community (efforts to develop a strong community fabric built on human development and relationships that unite stakeholders across power levels and social spheres) to varying degrees. In addition to the seasoned veterans of development and local government in Centre County, I was given the chance to personalize my research even further by sampling community development professionals from my hometown: Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In interviews with these practitioners, I sat in coffee shops, government offices, board rooms, and community centers and listened as community leaders described their work, the challenges they face, and their motivations for carrying on despite the impossible nature of many of the issues that they seek to address. The answers that they presented and the stories that they told acknowledged the difficulties and frustrations that accompany working to make change in the face of wicked problems, but in all cases, I left each interview feeling hopeful. Every interviewee that I spoke with seemed to project the same closing sentiment; that in order to make change, one needs to start small, and that these small changes are critical and requisite for changing the formal and informal institutions that drive many wicked social problems.

Though the issues posed by the sheer scale and deleterious scope of wicked problems that development professionals have to contend with are no less daunting to me than they were eight months ago, my engagement with this research process has encouraged me to think critically about how an individual can make change in their own context, and to some extent, has eased my anxiety about what it means to make change in the face of wicked problems. In speaking with the practitioners in this study, I've gained a clearer idea of what it looks like to lean in to the complex, difficult, and often taxing work of creating change, despite the unanswerable questions and intractable nature of the work itself. Central to this "leaning in" is making a point to cultivate strong bridging and bonding relationships that promote trust across varying levels of power and different social spheres, and then using these relationships to generate conversations that bring to light interests, concerns,

strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and goals that unite a community. Though, in some instances, the interdependency of actors in a community field may be a source of conflict, with the help of strong relationships, this interdependency can be leveraged in ways that employs the community as the unit of solution, and produces small-scale changes that, in many cases, make a large-scale difference for individuals and communities.

The nature of wicked problems is such that there are no easy answers, and though this seems like an obvious realization, acknowledging and internalizing it is key to developing an understanding of why creating localized change is important and how community development practitioners may successfully engage with creating change. The findings of this study suggest that one individual can be a significant force for change, and indeed, after speaking with the hardworking and tenacious practitioners in this study sample, I am no longer disenchanted or perturbed. Instead, I am hopeful. I am inspired. I am excited to graduate with the skills and academic knowledge-base unique to community development practitioners, and even more excited to apply this knowledge and develop my own personal philosophy of practice that will help me be an effective force for change in my own communities. Thus, I hope to plant the seeds of change that, when nurtured, may grow to change the world.

Chapter 1 |

Introduction

The business of making change is rife with challenges. In order to better individual communities and the world at large, community development professionals must tackle issues that are frequently cyclical and deeply rooted in institutions and culture across a variety of scales. Things like poverty, homelessness, crime, and lack of access to healthcare, education, and food are inextricably intertwined, as they repeatedly act as causes and symptoms of one another and are thus dynamic and difficult to address, let alone solve. Barriers to success in overcoming these deeply-rooted problems and creating positive social change are myriad, ranging from toxic individual mindsets, to socialized power structures, to bureaucratic red tape, to apathy. Further, the process of creating change is often contentious; in many cases, positive change for one stakeholder may mean perceived negative changes for another. Change processes that are steeped in contention and attract conflict only serve to deepen the intractable nature of the problem at hand.

Nonetheless, fostering and creating change is both possible and necessary, and so with these challenges in mind, it is worth exploring how individuals may contribute to causing positive change even in the face of complex, intractable social problems. Creating and contributing to positive social change is often the work of local leaders associated with nonprofit, government, business, and academic organizations. Specifi-

cally, organizations situated in or associated with the community development field are positioned in a place to affect change in intractable social problems on a local level. Thus, community development professionals from the aforementioned sectors are positioned to act as agents of change in their own communities.

Theories of social and institutional change provide an academic framework through which the complex process of community-based change can be examined and understood (Schmid, 2004). These theories serve to provide standard lenses with which academics and change agents alike can categorize change processes and more easily identify the critical mechanisms in creating this change. These theories may be applied to understand and produce solutions and build a significant knowledge base that is ideally transferable to addressing any number of intractable problems. It is worth noting that while theory can often be inferred *from* practice, it is hard to move the opposite way: from theory *to* practice. In short, applying theory to affect change is challenging. Individual social, economic, political, and ecological contexts produce a variability that makes formulaic approaches to change nearly impossible to implement. These unique contexts are particularly characteristic of the local environments in which community development professionals seek to create change, and so the application of theory as a model for change processes is often unrealistic as community development work mandates innovation and nuance as a fundamental element of practice. This difficulty is representative of the broader disconnect between theory and practice in creating change. With this disconnect in mind, it is worth asking, to what extent are social change theories reflected in practice, and how may these theories be integrated to represent a practicable model for creating change on the ground? How do individuals involved with localized development initiatives conduct their practice, and what do they consider to be the key elements in affecting meaningful, lasting change related to their own work? These questions are critical to

building a greater understanding of how localized change processes may be optimized in an effort to move forward in addressing a variety of social issues from a community development perspective.

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore what the process of creating social change looks like in a community development context in order to better understand whether and how change theories relate to community development practice. Insight will be gleaned by way of key informant interviews with community development professionals and will be thematically analyzed to establish the critical factors that enable and prohibit successful change processes, including key elements of practitioners' philosophies of practice. From here, the findings will be examined through the lens of various theories of institutional change presented by Schmid (2004). In broad strokes, this study will get at the larger questions, "How can one individual foster and catalyze change in practice?" and "How can that change be emulated and optimized with an integration of theory and practice?"

The objectives of this study are to understand:

- What is a community development practitioner's role and relationship to change?
- What are critical enabling factors and barriers to success that practitioners encounter in localized change processes?
- What behaviors and philosophies of personal practice contribute to a community development professional's ability to be a successful agent of change?

- How are change theories and practices best integrated to represent successful, localized change processes as they appear on the ground?

1.2 Moving Forward

The following section provides the background and theoretical framework that is helpful in understanding the gravity of intractable problems and how they relate to community development work. It then establishes the community development arena as one rife with opportunities for creating change, and follows with a discussion of a variety of social change theories and the practice-theory divide that plagues expert-citizen relationships. The case will be made for lessening this divide in order to promote more effective and efficient change processes in the community development field. Following this theoretical framework, Chapter 3 details the methods that were used to meet the objectives of this study, including key informant interviews and data analysis tactics. Chapter 4 discusses the findings and themes that emerged from interviews including the role of a community development professional in creating change, key enabling factors and common barriers to localized change processes, and critical elements of personal practice that interviewees identified as contributing to their success making change in the community development field. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the implications of these findings, including an exploration of the intersection of theory and practice in community development work, as well as an application of theory to major themes from the findings. Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude by identifying limitations of this study and positing areas for future inquiry, as well as the main takeaways from an exploration of community development work and its relationships to localized change.

Chapter 2 |

Background and Theoretical Framework

When thinking about one individual's ability to make change, particularly in the community development field, it is crucial to examine the nature of the issues that they may encounter. To that end, the following sections explore the nature of wicked problems, followed by the change-making nature of the community development field, with particular attention paid to the role of empowerment in localized change processes. After positioning the community development professional as an agent of change in a community context, the tensions between theory and practice will be discussed, as well as four theories of institutional change that may be used to explain or augment change processes in practice. The goal of this section is to expose the reader to a background and theoretical grounding that informed the subsequent findings and conclusions of this study.

2.1 Social Problems as Wicked Problems

Social problems, such as the ones that community developers often face and try to affect, are wicked problems, characterized by malignance, circularity, and general trickiness (Rittel and Webber, 1973). These problems are distinguished by their tendency toward intractability. Broad issues such as climate change or indigenous disadvantage are exemplary of the dynamic nature of wicked problems (Head, 2008).

In many cases, wicked problems present themselves as symptoms of other problems and exist within a dynamic web of interconnected institutional, historical, and political milieus that cannot be traced back to one, single cause, making them inherently unsolvable. Effects of these problems are felt on global, local, and individual scales and resolutions may be sought by a variety of different stakeholders. Pursuit of resolutions to these problems is often a source of conflict based on the positionality of various stakeholders within relevant political or social contexts, which only further contributes to the intractability of the issue itself (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Lewicki et al. (2003) identifies sources of intractability in social problems as fundamental tensions between parties involved, the controversial nature of the issues being disputed, the social context that an issue exists in, and the processes occurring within the conflict itself that often act as positive feedback loops for more conflict to arise. For community development professionals addressing social problems, the social context that an issue is rooted in is arguably the most immediate and interactional source of intractability affecting their work, though this context is inherently reliant on everyday politics in a community or geographic region (Boyte, 2004). This intractability is often compounded by the human tendency toward path-dependence, a phenomenon that promotes the status quo as a product of bounded human rationality and often gets in the way of making change in large-scale problems (Schmid, 2004). Thus, a community development professional must work within these political contexts to influence institutional shifts and create positive change related to wicked, intractable problems in a given social context.

At the core of every social context are questions related to power: who has it and what is it being used for? These questions are directly related to the depth of intractability in any given issue as well as an individual's ability to affect change in a social context. In many instances of intractable problems, the people whom the

problems affect are left powerless to address their own situation without intervention of an empowering third party. Lukes' (1974) theory of power being tri-dimensional is one that may be used to help explain elements of the intractability in certain social settings. Specifically, the three dimensions of power can be used to identify how power is mobilized to produce powerless, oppressed, or disenfranchised factions of society.

While the first dimension of power describes a political ecosystem where power is conceptualized in an ability to make decisions, and non-participation is assumed to reflect consensus, the second and third dimensions of power provide slightly more relatable frameworks for examining power relationships in practice. In the second dimension, power is mobilized to be exclusionary in the way that who has the power dictates political processes that may be designed to intentionally exclude certain participants or issues, while the third dimension identifies power in the ideological sense. In the third dimension, power is deeply rooted in social processes and norms that define what a community wants and perceives. This particular dimension of power may be difficult to identify or break free from without third party intervention, though it is worth noting that issues of identity that slow or hinder a change process may arise upon entrance of an intervening force (Fiol and O'Connor, 2002). Mechanisms of power in this third dimension may include banal things like the language and symbols of everyday communication (Gaventa, 1980). Together, the three dimensions of power interact to produce challenges to equal participation in political processes. This inequality may manifest in subsequent unequal access to resources like education, housing, or healthcare and result in larger societal trends that reinforce a cyclical culture of powerlessness. Wicked problems become even more wicked as power is mobilized in these ways.

With the intractable nature of social problems and their relationship to power

in mind, it is important to note that instead of solving these problems completely, progress may often only be made in small steps, with agents of change addressing one element of the problem at a time, unable to combat the dynamic forces or institutions responsible for the entire problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973). For these reasons, addressing wicked problems requires an interactional and multi-scale approach. Ostrom (2010) argues for a multi-scale approach to addressing intractable problems like climate change because when solutions are posed on multiple scales, there is more room for experimentation and development of solutions, as well as greater responsibility and accountability at a variety of levels. This same line of thinking applies to social problems, and necessitates a mid-level, community-scale approach to affecting social change in order to supplement approaches on the individual and national levels. In a similar vein, an interactional approach featuring cross-disciplinary collaboration that links stakeholders and experts across organizational boundaries or academic silos is critical for crafting sustainable and realistic solutions to intractable problems (Bridger and Alter, 2008; Batie, 2008). As community development professionals are uniquely positioned with the potential to create expert-to-expert and expert-to-citizen linkages, the community development field is a natural arena for crafting these sustainable solutions and helping organizations and individuals tackle intractable problems and pursue change. In this way, community development practitioners can be key contributors to the change process.

In order to understand the significance of community development professionals as agents of change, it is imperative to acknowledge the complexities and difficulties associated with making change in practice. As previously stated, social problems that community development professionals contend with are characterized by some degree of wickedness and intractability that often results from differing perspectives, conflict, and power politics on a variety of scales. In order for change to happen, these

interdependent power structures must experience some degree of upset, particularly when a development initiative seeks to empower certain factions of a community, which inherently shifts power from the elite core. In some cases, certain stakeholders may simply be resistant to change for the sake of preserving the status quo. Further, change is a multi-layer process, that involves affecting human perspectives and experiences that are inherently interdependent, in the way that one person's actions inevitably affect another's well-being either directly or by way of interactions with formal and informal institutions (Schmid, 2004). This interdependence produces and is produced by differing interests and the subsequent perspectives on if and how change should happen. These differing perspectives, combined with shifts in power, may result in conflict or pushback when change is imminent. Issues of who gets to define what "positive" change is, and who's interests count when altering these variables for the purpose of creating change often contribute to the difficulty that a development practitioner may face when seeking to create or catalyze change in a unique community context.

2.2 Change Work as Community Work

Community itself can be conceptualized on a variety of different levels, and thus, one single definition is illusive. For the purposes of relating community development to social change, community as it pertains to this project can be defined as, "a place-oriented process of interrelated actions through which members of a local population express a shared sense of identity while engaging in the common concerns of life... that occurs in a local society" while community development can be defined as "a process of building and strengthening the community" (Theodori, 2005). This definition establishes location as a necessary but not sufficient condition for creating a community, but delineates the social interactions that shape a local context as both

necessary and sufficient to craft a sustainable, productive community. Thus, to work with a community means to engage with not only the individuals that live there, but also the social, political, economic, ecological, institutional, and historical dimensions that shape a community's context.

Of course, there are different angles from which one may engage with a community's context for the purpose of development. For example, there is a marked difference between development *in* community and development *of* community (Summers, 1986). While development *in* a community involves pointed efforts to increase material well being by way of job creation, infrastructure improvement, worker skill trainings, and base economic development, development *of* community is a broader concept that aims to affect the social interactions that a community is built on. Development *of* community entails building the community from the inside out by facilitating the growth of strong, bridging relationships and the creation of social interactivness that can be harnessed to act on various public issues and create change in a given locality (Bridger and Alter, 2008). Often this development *of* community is supported or catalyzed by way of development *in* community.

There are a variety of approaches or avenues to change-making community development work, such as engagement with local universities (Bridger and Alter, 2006), extension (Peters, 2005), and numerous other community-based or community-driven development strategies (Mansuri and Rao, 2004; Checkoway, 1981). Things like base economic development, planning efforts, and infrastructure development serve to bolster and sustain developments of social capital and are a critical part of the development process. This combination of development *of* community and development *in* community is evident throughout much of the diverse work being done in non-profit economic development, neighborhood revitalization, anti-poverty work, affordable housing, extension and education, and local governments and planning agencies.

In all of these organizational settings, community development professionals may interact with a number of different issues and variables depending on their organizational expertise, including things like race, gender, class, and environment, all situated within individual community contexts. Thus, the goals of these organizations are necessarily varied. However, it is important to note that, despite different technical and institutional niches, community development organizations and professionals use similar strategies to affect change (Checkoway, 1995). At some level, there is a common belief that the community may be the source of many of their own solutions (Durning, 1989), and often a practitioner's role is to empower a community to recognize their assets and organize in a way that harnesses this potential, particularly when the practitioner or community is faced with barriers imposed by the aforementioned dimensions of power and particularly when the third dimension, socialized powerlessness, is at play (Gaventa, 1980). When this is the case, in order to affect change, a practitioner's role becomes more heavily related to the empowerment of a community. Empowerment inherently involves fostering power and building capacity in individuals or communities to enable them to act on issues that they deem important (Page and Czuba, 1999). Checkoway (1995) details empowerment as a "multilevel process which includes individual involvement, organizational development, and community change," emphasizing how multi-scaled and non-linear processes are characteristic of community development work. This mode of practice is characteristic of asset-based development practices, an alternative to need-based development, in which communities are recognized as having preexisting capacities that external assistance, such as a community developer, must help them recognize (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Practitioners may seek to empower communities and individuals through a variety of development approaches, including service delivery, capacity building, advocacy, and social mobilization (Schuftan, 1996).

Similar to asset-based development strategies, Boyte (2004) suggests public work as a nuanced approach to expert-citizen relationships that can be readily applied to community development. In this approach, the power to create change is inherent within a community. Public work becomes the avenue by which a populous can recognize and apply their collective democratic knowledge and harness the subsequent power that that knowledge affords. This public work framework relies less heavily on expert knowledge and action as a source of power, and instead conflates an ability to create change more heavily with local knowledge, community strengths, and democracy. When the interactions between this “inside” public work approach and an “outside” third party approach to development of community and addressing social problems are managed appropriately, this nexus can be a powerful force for creating change (Fiol and O’Connor, 2002).

Just as frameworks with which development professionals and communities approach change may differ, specific strategies used to promote or pursue change may vary as well. On a large scale, garnering support for time-sensitive issues by way of mass mobilization may be effective, while a mid-scale approach of creating powerful organizations to empower individuals may be more effective in another context or situation. Similarly, in some circumstances citizen participation, a means by which practitioners aim to involve individuals in “policy planning and program implementation of government agencies” may serve as a direct route to effective change (Checkoway, 1981). In other instances, public interest groups and advocacy or popular education may be more in line with a political or institutional context that an issue is situated in (Checkoway, 1995). In some way, each of these strategies involves cultivating agency for individuals or a community for the purpose of empowerment.

It is important to note that community development is characterized by intentional, structure-oriented efforts focused on the improvement of a community, not necessarily

the outcome of said efforts (Wilkinson and Society, 1991). Central to this process is the development of a resilient community field and the interactions that this field promotes (Bridger and Alter, 2008). In a strong community field, relationships are built across disciplines and interest areas in order to produce one cohesive community fabric. Though the strength and structure of this fabric may change over time, the relationships and intersecting interests in this field are critical to building capacity that may enable community members to address social issues and increase collective well-being. This community capacity and social capital is critical for countering intractability that results from conflicting interests, and indeed, a weak community field may contribute to the intractability associated with any given social problem. Though community development work is a lengthy, dynamic, and complex process, an interactional approach to development via the cultivation of a strong community field may undergird the work of community development professionals seeking to address other development initiatives *of* community and *in* community.

Finally, elements of personal practice for community development professionals serve as the cornerstones of their ability to effectively navigate complex change processes situated within challenging and unique community contexts. In identifying elements of personal practice that practitioners apply to their own work, it is important to distinguish between behaviors and philosophies of practice. Philosophies act as guiding principles, often based in a practitioner's own professional and personal ethics, that typically guide behaviors, specific actions within practice. Together, these behaviors and philosophies guide how a practitioner operates in a professional context. Argyris and Schon (1974) suggest that identifying these guiding elements of professional practice may help a practitioner further relate theory to their work making change on the ground, while it has also been purported that reflecting on these philosophies and behaviors that make up a person practice may be a source of

significant professional and personal development for practitioners in many disciplines (Kinsella, 2001). For these reasons, it is advantageous to identify critical elements of practice, including philosophies and behaviors, that contribute to success in the community development field.

2.3 Theory and Practice: Recognizing the Divide

With these things in mind, it is clear that community development professionals are uniquely positioned to address social issues and initiate change on a local level. In many cases, these practitioners act as a facilitator for applying academic knowledge in context-based ways to affect that change. They serve to bridge the gap between expert and local knowledge, while simultaneously acting in the role of the expert. In many ways, this relationship between practitioner and community is representative of the divide between expert and local knowledge in application, or the divide between theory and practice, a major focus of this project.

The challenges that exist at the intersection of theory and practice are representative of the broader challenge that is relating traditionally empirical, academic knowledge to practicable application. At the core of this issue is the modern mainstream tendency for a technocratic approach to public policy, science, and public problem solving (Fischer, 2000). Society's development as ever-increasingly industrial has created a sharp divide between citizen and expert knowledge. In the past century, this phenomenon has aided the development of strictly positivist knowledge as the gold standard, valuing generalist scientific approaches to acquiring knowledge over locally-based knowledge production (Fischer, 2000). Experts, including academics, tend to occupy an elite space that distances them from the layperson and makes the knowledge that they do produce largely inaccessible to the public, thus also often confining the solutions that may come about from this knowledge to an equally

inaccessible or irrelevant space in the eyes of the public. Additionally, this divide is exacerbated by differences in operations and priorities in research and decision-making settings (Schur et al., 2009). Among these differences is the way that researchers and decision-makers prioritize which issues to address in their respective projects and initiatives. Often, what's most relevant on the ground is not always most interesting for researchers to devote time, resources, academic space to, and thus, scientific rule and creation of knowledge for knowledge sake take priority over relevance or practicable solutions. This tendency, combined with the differences in time constraints and communication styles that each party operates under, further serves to widen the divide between theory and practice in many fields.

2.4 Social Change Theories

Relevant to questions about how an individual practitioner may affect localized change, theory serves to provide a framework with which to understand change processes. Change can be understood in a variety of ways. First, and most obviously, it can be observed as it occurs on a variety of scales, ranging from an individual to an institutional level. Factors facilitating and catalyzing change may also be observed, and from this, information about the change process may be gleaned. Looking deeper, though, theories may bring about greater insight into the mechanisms and process of creating change. Social change theories are one lens with which it is possible to go about conceptualizing the change process relevant to community development work. These theories may serve to inform, support, or confirm the validity of common practices, and provide opportunity to apply their frameworks when approaching change in practice.

Schmid (2004) highlights four broad theories of institutional change that are used to analyze community development change processes. Those theories of institutional

change are: functional, power, isomorphic, and learning-evolutionary models. Functional change theory relies on the idea that change is caused by actors looking to benefit from a specific function of said change. Power theories specify that a dominant group will make changes at will without input from subordinate groups. Isomorphic theories relate to the idea of path dependence and bounded rationality, and the idea that organizations tend toward the status quo unless they deliberately make moves to deviate from the norm. Finally, learning-evolutionary theories are based in the tendencies for social learning to produce objective and preference changes despite little to no change in environment. In any given development or change situation, a combination of any of these theories may be applied to understand and systematize the complex dynamics of a change process. Thus, an investigation about how these theories interact in practice is useful for gaining a clearer picture of what the intersection of theory and practice looks like on the ground. Particularly in the community development field where change processes are highly complex and individualized based on unique community contexts, ascertaining the ways in which these four change theories may be observed could prove useful to practitioners seeking to glean a deeper understanding of change processes and community context that they have observed, as well as provide useful information regarding the ways that theories may be applied to inform future work in the community development field in the future.

With this theoretical grounding and background in mind, it is possible to move forward with an exploration of the study objectives. The following chapter will describe the process by which data was collected and analyzed. Subsequently, there will be a presentation of the data in the form of major findings, followed by a discussion of these findings and their connection to the theoretical framework presented in this section. Major takeaways, implications for practitioners, limitations of this study, and

areas for future inquiry will serve to address and expand upon the broader questions driving this study.

Chapter 3 |

Methods

In order to glean information about how practitioners perceive their role in creating change, in-depth conversations with these individuals related to the objectives of this study were had. These conversations took place through a series of semi-structured individual interviews conducted with 12 community development professionals from two sources in Pennsylvania: Penn State University and Lancaster County. Interviews were based on a series of standard, open-ended questions that included probes aimed to elicit specific examples and stories from interviewees regarding their experiences catalyzing change. Through this dialogic questioning strategy, a more thorough understanding of each individual's personal practice and their relationship to creating change was produced. All methods and interview protocols were screened and approved by the Penn State Office for Research Protection's Institutional Review Board prior to the informant recruitment and interview process.

The following sections detail the methods used to conduct this study, beginning with the criteria with which study participants were selected. Following these selection criteria, the interview processes are presented, including the strengths and limitations of using in-person, narrative inquiry-based interview techniques. Finally, a brief summary of data analysis and presentation tactics are discussed in order to set the stage for Chapter 4, a presentation of the major findings.

3.1 Informant and Site Selection

Informants for this study were selected based on their active contributions and leadership in their respective organizations as well as their reputations as knowledgeable and effective practitioners in various types of community development work. Professionals from local government, planning agencies, non-profits, extension, and broad community development offices in Centre County and the City of Lancaster were first identified with the help of contacts at Penn State University and in the City of Lancaster. Respondents in the initial sample then were asked to suggest other relevant community development professionals that they felt would be beneficial to the study, allowing the interview pool to be expended by way of snowball sampling.

Centre County and Lancaster County were each chosen as hubs of interviewee selection for unique reasons. First, Centre County provided immediate accessibility and high levels of practicality. The presence of a university community allowed interviewees to be selected from extension agencies and academic affiliates, while university contacts were also able to recommend members of local government and planning agencies that they deemed to be reputable practitioners fit to be interviewed for this study. Lancaster County was chosen as a subject selection hub because of the diverse community development work occurring in and around the City of Lancaster and the growth and revitalization that the city has experienced over the last decade. Specifically, interviewees in Lancaster worked in a variety of different non-profit organizations, including: neighborhood revitalization, anti-poverty, community organizing, economic development, and local business development.

The diverse types of professionals working in Centre County and Lancaster County provide a rich mix of community development approaches to analyze. Extension professionals serve to provide insight into ways in which academia and community

are being connected to produce positive change, while local government and planning agencies provide the perspective of community development from within a formal political system, serving to develop and single out specific limitations of creating change in these contexts. Finally, the diverse non-profit community development work being done in the City of Lancaster provides opportunity to highlight multiple types of expertise and professional practice all operating in very hands-on ways to address a variety of issues all positioned in the same social and political context.

3.2 Interview Process

Individual interviews were selected as the main mode of data collection because they provided the greatest opportunity to collect in-depth information from a variety of community development professionals and to “co-create meaning” related to these perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). A total of twelve semi-structured individual interviews were conducted over the course of a four-week period. This sample included 6 male and 6 female respondents, with 2 of these females being women of color. Each interview ranged in time from 30 minutes to one and a half hours, and was audio-recorded and transcribed to utilize in the data processing stage of the study. Ten out of the 12 interviews were conducted in person, with the final two interviews conducted via phone.

Overall, the interview questions were designed for the purpose of addressing the four main objectives of this study, with questions categorized into three main sections: Context (to provide background on the interviewee and their involvement with community development), Experience and Change (to understand how that individual’s experience has shaped their perceptions of and relationship to the change process and to identify factors that enable or prohibit change), and Philosophy of Practice (to understand what personal attributes contribute to that individual’s

ability to affect change as well as how they have seen change happen in their own professional experiences).

3.3 Strengths and Limitations

In general, in-person interviews tend to provide opportunities for richer, more personal conversation due to the synchronicity of time and place for interviewer and interviewee and the availability of referencing social cues and body language throughout the conversation (Opdenakker, 2006). Further, though the interviews in this study were guided by a prescribed set of questions, these questions were open-ended and loosely structured to allow for interviewees to give expanded, example-based answers. The advantages of this type of questioning are similar to the advantages of narrative inquiry methods overall. Narrative inquiry-based questions tend to prompt interviewees to tell a story and typically allow for more personalization of answers than a traditional survey question, and may elicit topics or themes that the interviewer was not aware of due to the open-ended and personal nature of the interview (Riley and Hawe, 2005).

There are also limitations of this type of interview setting. First, the interviewer must account for the natural bias that is presented when asking a subject about their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Depending on the level of comfort of the interviewee, responses may be cut short or skewed in a positive or negative way. Additionally, due to the synchronicity of time and place, the interviewee has little time to reflect on a question before providing an answer, which may be either advantageous or disadvantageous (Opdenakker, 2006). Finally, the open-ended nature of this type of interview presents challenges for data analysis. Since the answers that the researcher receives may not be as structured as answers that would be received in a survey-based research method, there are inherent issues of credibility and quality

with which the researcher must contend (Patton, 1999). This was taken into account when formulating a data analysis strategy to process the interview data.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data collected throughout the interview process, each interview was first transcribed. From there, transcriptions were thoroughly read and reviewed and interview responses were indexed by their relevance to the study objectives. Next, responses were examined using inductive techniques of constant comparison for the purpose of identifying analytical categories as they emerged from the data (Pope et al., 2000). Similarly, stories provided by interviewees were holistically analyzed for content (Bleakley, 2005), and then specifically examined through the lens of Schmid's (2004) institutional change theories.

In the next section, the findings of this study are presented. Though the initial approach to data analysis sought to address each objective separately, the results were overlapping, and emergent themes transcended multiple objectives. For this reason, the findings are presented roughly as they relate to the aforementioned objectives, but also organized in a way that seeks to relate overlapping themes to one another. Following the presentation of these major themes, the findings are related to practitioners' philosophies for approaching intractable, wicked problems in general. These approaches are then compared and contrasted to theories of institutional change to examine how they align or do not align. Finally, there will be a discussion of the implications of these findings, the limitations of this study, and potential areas for future research, as well as final thoughts related to the broad questions guiding this study.

Chapter 4 |

Findings

The findings of this study are separated into sections roughly following the study objectives established in Chapter 1. These sections include: 1) A Practitioner’s Role and Relationship to Change, 2) Critical Enabling Factors and Barriers to Success in the Change Process, and 3) Professional Practice: The Community Developer as a Successful Change Agent. Though it was beneficial to divide the findings in this manner for organizational purposes, it is important to note that themes from each section are in many cases, overlapping across objectives, and often serve to inform one another. Together, these sections provide insight into how community development professionals do and can contribute to change processes, things that might enable or hinder their success, and what elements of professional practice can aid a practitioner as they perform their role within a given change process. These three sections will inform the following discussion about what personal philosophies respondents from this study employ when approaching large societal or intractable problems and how these approaches to change align with theories of social change. With this information, we will begin to tackle the broader questions guiding this study, namely “How can one individual foster and catalyze change?” and “How can that change be emulated and optimized with an integration of theory and practice?”.

4.1 A Practitioner's Role and Relationship to Change

In general, data evidenced that the role of a practitioner in a community change process was not to directly determine, craft, or shape change. Instead, ten out of twelve interviewees expressed that they saw themselves more as facilitators or enablers of change, in one way or another. One interviewee went so far as to say “I view myself as a servant to the [community]. It’s not about me.” Another interviewee stated:

I think a practitioner should be helping a community if a community identifies that it wants to create change. The practitioner’s role should be helping provide the tools and a framework for that community to do it, but I don’t think the community practitioners themselves should be doing the change.

Related sentiments were echoed by an interviewee that stated:

It’s not my job to come in and tell [a community] how to do anything. I have opinions about stuff, and obviously a skill set and knowledge base, but it’s my job to draw them into this common space of co-learning and relationship building and trust-building that’s informed by the issues.

Similarly, most interviewees expressed that their role in the change process is heavily related to facilitating the creation of partnerships or relationships across a variety of interest groups and organizations in an effort to, as two interviewees described it, build a “stronger community fabric” and generate conversation. Many of the practitioners alluded that their position as a professional in the community development field uniquely positioned them to identify critical partners and convene these important conversations as a neutral party. These relationships and conversations were said to be critical for identifying opportunities where change can happen

and where there are partners that would be willing to make it happen. Interviewees mentioned partners from the business community, banks, churches, public health agencies, non-profit organizations, local governments, school boards, and citizenry as being important pieces of a community that should be included in planning and initiating a change process, with particular emphasis put on connecting complementary efforts to contribute to development *in* a community and development *of* community. As one interviewee put it:

We have to learn to partner at a very high level so that those of us who are highly focused on human development and those who are focused on physical development can all sit down together and plan on parallel tracks and see how we can improve each other's outcomes... We have to look for ways where the projects can touch each other, integrate, leverage strengths, mask weaknesses. Let's do that and stop shutting each other out. Collective impact is a huge piece of how we get work done.

The majority of interviewees noted that these partnerships and the resulting conversations were critical to shaping sustainable, community-driven change. Elements of practitioners' personal practice, including the necessity of prioritizing active listening, that contribute to their ability to effectively facilitate conversations to create change will be discussed later. Next, over half of the interviewees mentioned capacity building as a critical function of practitioners in a community setting. Though the approach to this capacity building varied depending on the nature of the organization that each interviewee worked for, in all cases it involved helping communities and individuals recognize their strengths and assets or developing these strengths and assets, and then working with them to figure out the best way to align their assets with the image of the future that they have in mind. One of the interviewees who identified capacity building as a key function of community development practitioners defined

capacity building as:

Not only helping people and organizations through a specific issue or objective that they have at the moment, but giving them the tools so that they can go back and do the same thing or similar things in the future. For instance, if a community organization came to me and said we just don't know how to reach our population, we don't know who needs our services, we don't really understand the changes in our environment, and we want to do a community survey and figure out what's going on out there and help identify some needs, my goal would be not only to assist them in doing that survey but to give them the tools to be able to do it themselves in the future.

Digging deeper into their role in communities, several interviewees identified empowerment as a critical goal and outcome of the capacity building that falls under a practitioner's professional jurisdiction. Empowerment was a theme that was discussed in either overt or implied terms by the majority of respondents and one respondent specifically defined it as, "giving [people] the tools to be the heroes in their own community story." As an example of how empowering community members may be an effective force for change, one interviewee discussed the contentious issue of maintaining sidewalk infrastructure in low-income neighborhoods in Lancaster City, postulating that empowerment could be both the root and the gateway to effective community-based change. He propounded:

If you empower the people in the South Side they will take care of their own sidewalks. It doesn't need to be a special sidewalk grant. In the Southside, if we could empower people and give them time to civically engage and give them the time and the tool sets they need to advocate for themselves

and facilitate a trip to the county commissioners' meeting they will make sure that they get those good sidewalks.

Overall, interviewees generally supported the notion that the primary role of the community development professional should be to facilitate a change process and empower people to effectively take part in that process. Next, the critical enabling factors for a successful change process and notable barriers that prohibit change from happening will be discussed.

4.2 Critical Enabling Factors and Barriers to Success in the Change Process

Throughout the interviews, practitioners spoke about a variety of enabling factors that assist in catalyzing localized change processes, as well as barriers that may prohibit success in these change processes. These enabling factors and barriers will be discussed, respectively.

4.2.1 Enabling Factors

As previously mentioned, helping to build and facilitate strong relationships was seen as one of the primary roles of community development professionals. In addition to being a major theme in that respect, interview results yielded that the presence of strong relationships and partnerships, both between development practitioners and a community, as well as within a community itself, is the single most important enabling factor for creating change. This theme was mentioned explicitly in every single interview, indicating that strong relationships are a critical element of the change process. One respondent spoke specifically about the necessity of partnerships with other change agents or power-holders when trying to make change, stating:

You can't do things alone when you're trying to create change. You have to get buy-in from other strong stakeholders. If you're working with people that are coming from at-risk or low-income communities there are a lot of challenges that they're going to be facing so we need to be advocates for them. We have to understand politics and be positioned in a way that we can advocate for their needs so that as we're helping them we also have the support of the people that have the power to help them grow as well. These power-holders could be willing to change their mind or change their perspective on how things are currently operating, [so] you need to have a good relationship with them so they trust you and know you're worth investing in to create that change

Respondents in five interviews specifically discussed how the different types of partnerships were fundamental to producing trust, another significant enabling factor in the change process. Trust was referenced as something that could assist developers in dealing with the difficult everyday politics of community development work. Relevant to this point, one respondent stated:

The politics involved are huge and seem intractable at times. But nothing is impossible. You have to chip away... Build allies and credibility. Part of the role is to be honest. As soon as you lose trust it's over. And that is trust all over. It's trust of community residents because if they stop trusting you you're done. That trust piece is built on listening and then doing what you said you were going to do. Then you have to trust your peers. Things like, "I'm not here to steal your grant money or board members, I need you to work with me." We need to work together if we ever want to solve these huge community level issues.

Throughout the interviews, several respondents referenced the ideas of trust and

credibility in a very related manner, if not interchangeably. Trust was discussed as something that is critical for developing a practitioner's credibility, but also as something that is reinforced by credibility reflected in a practitioner's demonstrated skill-sets and professional successes. Six interviewees specifically pointed out that credibility is a critical element of their own successes creating change, thus echoing the sentiments of those respondents that prioritized trust as a critical enabling factor in the change process. One respondent discussed the interplay between strong relationships and trust, emphasizing that a practitioner's knowledge and skill set is crucial for cultivating their credibility, which may be reinforced by their willingness to engage in strong, mutualistic relationships. This respondent explains:

I believe that someone in my position needs to have a broad understanding [of a social issue]. You also have to have credibility in the community, building that trust, because the people believe that you have knowledge because you are able to exchange ideas effectively and build partnerships. The relational part of this work is very important, and I think the credibility that you can gain in the community can really help you build those relationships.

Transparency and authenticity of an organization were identified as conduits for building trust. These themes are largely related to the establishment of credibility within an organization. As an organization presents itself and its operations in a way that demonstrates to community members that the organization's interests are genuine and oriented towards serving the local community, trust is built between community members and the organization, and the credibility of that organization in the eyes of the community is bolstered.

Another bridge between development organizations and community is the utilization of local leadership. Four other interviewees referenced the importance and value

of identifying local leaders within the community to enable a change process. Ideally these individuals are long-standing residents of an area with their own community credibility, as well as possess willingness to be vocal about wanting to insight change. One interviewee gave an example of how he currently utilizes this type of local leadership when trying to make change related to neighborhood revitalization in Lancaster City by designating specific “Block Captains” in low-income census tracts. These Block Captains are people who “have lived on their block for a long time, are already well-connected and vocal so people know who they are.” They function as liaisons between practitioners and community members, and are key informants for conveying the priorities and goals of a particular neighborhood. Block Captains are just one example of a form of community-based leadership that can be used to enable a change process.

4.2.2 Barriers

In addition to the aforementioned critical enabling factors of localized change processes, two major barriers to creating change were identified upon an analysis of the interview data. First, a lack of diversity was seen as a hindering factor in working to create change from a development organization perspective. Three interviewees spoke about how a lack of diversity and local representation in community development organizations detracted from healthy relationships and trust between practitioners and community residents, and in many cases hindered the change process. Each of these interviewees spoke specifically about the challenges of convincing a low-income community primarily comprised of people of color to work with practitioners that were seemingly disconnected from that community’s local reality. One interviewee spoke at length about her experiences as a woman of color trying to bridge the gap between community development practitioners, local government agencies, and people

in the communities that her organization sought to serve, stating:

Even though the structure doesn't look like me, or us, and none of my traditions are here, I am stepping in because I need to help make change for us by way of being included and no matter what it feels like, how hard it is, it is important.

Another practitioner identified a lack of diversity in organizational leadership as a barrier to change, asking:

If we're trying to build this equitable community but we have no one of color who is standing at the front [of an initiative] how are we going to model that for those that want to move up?

Similarly, another interviewer echoed how a lack of representation of community demographics in local governing bodies or development organizations may stall the change process, or direct it in a way that is not most effective or warranted in a community. That interviewee reflected:

If you look around here it's mostly retired white males on these governing bodies. Young people are working and they either don't have the time because they are raising a family or meetings are held during the day and they can't get off work. So you kind of get a group of retired guys that are running the municipalities and they don't always have the same perspective that other people in the community have. So they're out there pushing for their ideas but maybe that's not a good reflection of what's happening and how the community is made up.

Finally, a last major barrier to creating change that was specifically identified or alluded to by over half of the interviewees is the issue of operating within change-resistant

social and political contexts underscored by difficult power structures. Change may be inhibited by a social context in which powerful people are historically unwilling or structurally unable to work together. Issues of pride or a desire to centralize decision-making power may generate conflict and exacerbate these divisive social and institutional contexts. In describing the major challenges and difficulties associated with making change amid uncooperative parties and histories, one respondent stated:

Most of it revolves around legacy and perceptions of legacy, which are also wrapped up in power structures... If you've got three old boys that have been running the show for the last 30 years, you can have good people around the edges that really care, that really have lots of heart and lots of skills, but they're bumping up against that dynamic... I call them the "confounding bastards" because you've got them in many [community development] issues.

This same respondent goes on to expand on the difficulties posed by historical dissonance between stakeholders:

Social dynamics are no small issue...Two communities won't work together because they've been rivals at football for the last however many years- that stuff really happens. When, by all accounts, they would be better off if they shared services or they even became one municipality...But there's distrust and dislike and legacy sediment, social sediment, that makes effectively exploring opportunities for change more complicated.

In addition to these structural power issues, several interviewees also referenced power socialized via public discourse that affects citizen mindsets as something that acts as a barrier to creating change. Specifically, two interviewees spoke about how the stigmas attached to vulnerable low-income populations hinders the ability of development

professionals to empower these populations. When asked about the biggest barriers to creating change, one interviewee expressed his frustrations about these stigmas and how they impact the populations that him and his fellow practitioners typically work with. He stated:

Our community conversations, the fact that we are still talking about poverty like everyone in poverty is lazy. That is the national conversation. The conversation has to change. Most of the people that I meet are working much harder than I am. I am making more money. They are figuring out childcare, the bus schedule. They are working jobs that are physically difficult. They are working at it for 8 to 10 to 12 hours a day. They are working really hard. So, when the narrative is that they are lazy and they need to get their act together, that is demoralizing. We have killed hope with our community conversations and hope has to be there.

Despite these challenges, the practitioners that were interviewed generally expressed hopeful or positive views about engaging with communities in change processes, and the majority of respondents were outspoken about their belief that one individual can indeed be a force for change, particularly when enabling factors like strong relationships, trust, and organizational credibility are cultivated. In addition to these factors, elements of professional practice were also cited as factors that may serve to catalyze and facilitate localized change processes in the community development field. Next, key elements of philosophy and behavior that comprise personal practices that enable community development professionals to successfully engage in these change processes will be examined, followed by interviewees' philosophies for approaching large societal or intractable problems.

4.3 Professional Practice: The Community Developer as a Successful Change Agent

Throughout the interviews, many respondents spoke about what traits, characteristics, or tendencies make them successful in contributing to community-based change in their own work. Though their practices and philosophies differed somewhat based on each interviewee's respective organizational and community context, there were a few major themes that emerged as critical elements of practice that beget success in the community development arena. These themes include both behaviors and philosophies that make up practitioners' working professional practices, and it is important to note that there were frequent overlaps and interplay between these behaviors and philosophies that will be discussed herein.

One major theme that emerged in speaking with the practitioners was the weight that they place on prioritizing community knowledge, typically explained as a component of their operating philosophies and demonstrated through their actions making change on the ground. The majority of respondents emphasized that solutions should not come from the top, but instead from within a community. One respondent specifically outlined the different sources of knowledge that he prioritizes in his work, stating:

It's about appreciating all types of knowledge. The expert knowledge, the local knowledge, the indigenous knowledge. Valuing that and then integrating that into the solutions of the projects so that people can see that reflected in what ends up and they can take part in the solution, whatever role they want to take or wherever their organization fits.

With respect to working with communities to produce collaborative solutions, another interviewee postulated:

I think [a community development professional] has got to be willing to question their own knowledge. I think they've got to realize they don't have all the answers and never will. They need to recognize and truly believe that the solutions are there. The solutions can be created, co-created, by the community, by the different organizations there... I learned early on that I don't have all the answers. The answers are really community and issue and organization specific and they have to be involved in identifying them and understanding the journey that they need to undertake to do something about it.

This theme is undoubtedly related to a practitioner's role as a facilitator or enabler of change. The idea that community knowledge is important and should be valued also underscores the importance of generating strong partnerships within and around the community in order to create space for conversations where that community knowledge can be shared. In this way, the previous behavioral theme, cultivating strong relationships, is reflective of the guiding philosophy of valuing all types of knowledge.

Three respondents spoke at length about the importance of active, engaged listening as a behavior or strategy that they use to encourage these conversations and instances of knowledge sharing, as well as to garner a more thorough understanding of an issue or the social and political landscape that they are practicing in. One practitioner described how, when engaging with a community in a change process, he made a point to ask questions that directly target a community's wants and needs in their own words. He emphasized how he makes a point to listen to the answers that community members provide with the intention of "really hearing." Amongst these were questions like, "What are your dreams for yourself and your family?" and "If the [organization's name] could only do one thing, what would you want it to

be?” These questions evidence this particular practitioner’s desire to understand more thoroughly how he and other experts can align their practices with community opinions and perspectives. Similar sentiments were expressed by several of the other practitioners as well.

Similarly, one respondent shared his guiding mantra, “Come, let us reason together,” in order to evidence how he prioritizes the co-creation of knowledge and strong integration of community and expert knowledge to produce collaborative, relevant solutions. Again, through this practitioner’s personal mantra we see elements of his philosophies that serve as a framework for how he operates in practice. To demonstrate this, the interviewee went on to state:

We know many technical solutions to many of the issues, whether its water or environment or land-use or economic development of human services. Whatever it is, [the solutions] have to happen within the context of the stakeholders that are involved in that particular community context or organizational context. Without that...we’re at loggerheads unless we can approach these things differently from a dialogue and deliberative perspective and a broader knowledge context, a broader value context, a broader respect context, and respecting all types of knowledge and all types of perspectives. If not we’re not going to get anywhere.

Following the valuation of local knowledge, the largest necessary components of personal practice that a majority of respondents referenced throughout their interviews were patience and tenacity, core elements of philosophy that guide behavior. Several interviewees described the difficulty of engaging in this type of work, and expressed that they view doing community development work and creating change as a messy and complex process. “There’s nothing clean about it. There’s nothing simple about it,” said one respondent. Another respondent stated:

It's never easy and it's always different and it's sort of exhausting sometimes. From my perspective, it takes a lot out of you. It really requires your whole being to sometimes enter muddy or contested or controversial milieus or gatherings or whatever, and that's hard, hard, hard work.

This comment and others made by the practitioners in this sample reflect the intractable nature of some of the issues that a community development professional may encounter throughout his or her engagement with a change process. In general, interviewees readily acknowledged the difficulties presented by these large-scale problems. When asked about their philosophies for creating change with respect to these intractable problems, the majority of respondents agreed: a change agent needs to start small. An individual may contribute to creating change, but only with the help of the relationships that were deemed so critical to a successful change process. Two interviewees in particular delineated their approaches to instigating change, referencing poignant metaphors to describe their philosophies. The first stated:

Sometimes when you look at [an issue] you just have to have an "eat the elephant" philosophy and break it down into bits...Compartmentalize problems- this is one issue that we can work together on rather than changing the whole system right now maybe if we can solve this one problem that will lead to incremental change over time. The authorities have been around for over 50 or 70 years and they have their own culture. We're not going to change that overnight. Let's start by cooperating at a smaller scale and see if we can get people working on the bigger problems.

Another respondent similarly responded:

You need to unpack and peel away the onion. What assets do we have that you we can build on? What are the things going on around us that

we might want to consider and think about? It's really starting on an individual level to really craft a question without a solution in it but a true question around which dialogue can take place.

With the challenges posed by addressing intractable problems from a community development perspective in mind, it is critical to acknowledge and understand practitioner's motivations for engaging in such taxing work, as these motivations reflect important elements of their guiding philosophies of practice. When asked the question, "What motivates you to do the work that you do?" eight of the respondents referenced a personal story that either connected to them specifically to the community that they currently work in, how they benefitted from or experienced community development work in their own life histories, or how they had an empathetic positionality in relation to the people that their work serves. To illustrate this, one respondent spoke about his childhood growing up as part of a low-income family. He explained:

I know at a visceral level what this system feels like. What it feels like to sit in a waiting room with your mom for two hours and then be told that you don't qualify and to go home. I know all that. So here I am 20 years later and I can do something about it. That's what gets me up in the morning. Now I am in a place that can make systems change.

In reference to her connection to the City of Lancaster and how that informs and enhances her work in the community, another respondent stated:

I have made it an unwavering point in my career over the last 20 years to live in low income communities. I don't feel like I can do this work if I'm not a stakeholder in the community and if I'm not in it in the same way that my neighbors are... I think it has a different level of intentionality, authenticity, and opportunity for respect if you walk the talk...My kids

go to the School District of Lancaster like my neighbors do...I think that also makes me a more effective change agent because [Lancaster] is my home, my life, my community, and there's not separation between work and home. This low income community is my community and I need to work on its behalf because I am a part of it.

Additionally, another respondent referenced her connection to her community, as well as the ethics and morality that serve as key elements of her philosophy of practice, saying simply:

This is my community and I'm invested in it. It's personal, I have a personal stake in it. I think it's very much the way that I grew up... with ethics and morality and a lot of things that were taught about what it looks like to love your neighbor and what's expected of people who have been given great opportunity and that it's about sharing it with others and not necessarily enriching just yourself.

Yet another interviewee referenced elements of her personal practice as she spoke about how she sees herself in the people that her work seeks to serve, explaining:

It's me. I am all of those issues that you see and it makes me really upset. I am very driven and passionate to create balance and fairness and when I see that there's some type of injustice that's rooted in some type of crazy systemic oppression that's been rooted in our system for years and still hasn't changed that pisses me off. And that drives me.

Clearly, a personal investment in a community or a tendency toward empathy is an element of practice that may contribute to a practitioner's success engaging in the taxing change process at a local level.

Together, a development practitioner's role in the change process, enabling factors and challenges that these practitioners may meet, and behavioral and philosophical elements of their personal professional practice shape a practitioner's ability to be successful in engaging with localized change. The following section will involve a discussion of how these approaches to creating change align with the previously discussed theories of institutional change, as well as key takeaways from these findings and their connections to theory. Finally, in Chapter 6 the limitations of this study will be discussed, and areas for future, related research will be discussed. This paper will conclude with a synopsis of the findings and what these findings mean for current and future change agents in the community development field.

Chapter 5 |

Discussion

The final question that was asked in every interview conducted for this study sought to bring to light stories of practitioner experiences, told in their own words. The question, “Can you think of a time when you saw your work producing positive change? What did that look like? What did that feel like?” often brought about laughs, reflective moments, and even a few tears shared between interviewer and interviewee. The following story is no exception; in sharing it, the practitioner spoke of his own role in catalyzing one particular community development initiative, as well as his emotional ties to the event. This story perfectly encapsulates major findings of this study, and reflects the spirit of what it means to be an agent of change in the community development field.

5.1 *Paint the Town*

I'm home on the weekend in Tampa and I am watching the Sunday morning news and there is a story talking about restoring community in the recession. It's about a widower who was depressed, clinically depressed. His wife died after they were married for 50 years and he was just wallowing in it and meanwhile, his town is falling apart too. He's watching decay. His wife has just passed. He's feeling all of this and he just decided one day to

buy some paint. He went to one of the broken properties in his town and he painted it and made it beautiful and then he kept doing it. The title of the news segment was "Painting the Town" and what happened was everyone else who was depressed about the recession starting joining him after a while and then contractors started donating paint and workers on the weekend to help paint buildings and then the whole town was starting to look better so it felt better, and other good things began to happen.

The next day, I walked into work all excited and I told my staff that I wanted us to have an event and call it "Paint the Town" for our community. Like the story of stone soup, everyone brings an ingredient and there is collective impact. We did the first "Paint the Town" in January 2013. We only had 3 months to plan. I decided that "the perfect will not be the enemy of the good" and we will just do as well as we can this year and we will make it more perfect next year. We pushed forward and got [university] students, property managers, community partners, funders, got a sponsorship from PNC [bank]...

[On the day of the event] we went out in the community and we had slightly over 1000 people at the event. We gathered them at our community center to start and did a pep-rally. "Lets go do this for our community!" We had all these events lined up. One was this area that was known in the county for drug use and prostitution and it was just full of garbage. We wanted to turn it into a community garden. There was a little clubhouse, we painted that. There was a wall that was around a subdivision that was covered in gang tags and 4 letter words on the main route to the elementary school. We painted that entire 400 ft. wall. We gave everyone t-shirts. We got out there and did all this work. We cut bushes down,

removed trash. We also had homeless services out there. There were dirty mattresses that people had been sleeping on. We were connecting people that needed them [to the mattresses] when we found them.

Now [Paint the Town] is in its fifth year. Now they are doing murals, they have expanded the community garden. Over 25 percent of the people who came out that first day were residents of that neighborhood. It wasn't just the white people coming out to "tell us what they are going to do for us." They have GIS mapping and tracked crime in that area for the year prior to the garden and cleanup and the year after the garden opened and crime went down 41 percent. There was no other change on the block. Not only was there food from the garden, but there was a change in activity that discouraged crime.

That was one of those projects that was real. You met the people doing the work, you were side by side with them. People were mulching, people were painting. The whole wall got painted. When it was all done, we had a huge block party. Kids were dancing, There were hamburgers, hot dogs, chips, all this great stuff to celebrate what we had done together as a community. I was exhausted. We started around 8 in the morning so now its like 1:30-2:00 and I get in my car and I just start driving around to all the places that we had just cleaned up. I am driving past the future community garden site and here comes a mom, a dad, and a kid on his bike and they are all wearing the Paint the Town t-shirts. I have no idea who they are. I've never met them before in my life. It's clear that they live in the neighborhood and they are just going home from this and I teared up. It was powerful, that cohesiveness. It was an amazing day. Recently, I just got all the pictures from the 5th annual Paint the Town.

It just feels good to know its still going on!

This story, just one of the many inspiring tales provided by community development professionals that were interviewed, evidences several major findings of this study. In this story, one individual practitioner took it upon himself to catalyze change, utilizing his community as the unit of solution. With the help of partnerships from diverse organizations, this individual forged a path toward positive development in community for the purpose of development of community. High levels of involvement from neighborhood residents and a decrease in crime rates after the start of the community garden hint at the empowerment that a deeper ownership of and involvement with one's community can convey.

As previously mentioned, the findings of this study have affirmed the position of community development professionals as agents of change. Specifically, interviews with this sample of practitioners established them as enablers and facilitators of change who often contend with difficulties posed by socialized and structural power. Tenants of personal practice, including a prioritization of local knowledge and active listening skills contributed to these practitioners' successes in the field, while strong relationships, trust, and local leadership were found to be critical enabling factors for a successful change process.

With this in mind, it is appropriate to discuss how these findings inform the final study objective, "How are change theories and practices best integrated to represent successful, localized change processes as they appear on the ground?" An exploration of the intersection between theory and practice in community development work will be followed by a discussion of three main takeaways from the findings, including: how and why power and politics inhibit change, the interplay between development in community and development of community as a conduit for sustainable, localized change, and finally, the necessity for an expanded conceptualization of what constitutes

an expert in the community development field.

5.2 Intersection of Theory and Practice

Theories of institutional change are useful for shaping understandings about how change happens. Though their traditional application may be retrospective and exist in an academic context, these theories may also prove useful when applied and integrated with practice, particularly in a professional field that is heavily focused on making or catalyzing change.

Throughout the course of this research, it became clear that in order to examine the intersection of theory and practice, it would be impossible to use one theory at a time. Schmid (2004) presents functional, power, isomorphic, and learning-evolutionary theory groups as theories of social and institutional change, all of which have relevance in the social and political landscapes that community development practitioners seek to make change in. The findings of this study, combined with sentiments and experiences expressed in stories provided by interviewees suggest that an integration of all four theories is the most realistic model for representing the change process as it occurs on the ground. At any given time throughout a change process, elements of each theory may be in play, and the prioritization of one over another is entirely situational. Though a practitioner may not necessarily shape change by way of molds that directly align with individual theories, they may leverage these theories individually to complement and catalyze change from different angles. An awareness of how these theories interact and may be leveraged could be advantageous for a practitioner seeking to more deeply understand enabling factors and barriers that they encounter in a community-based change process.

Of the four aforementioned change theories, two hold particular relevance in relationship with the findings of this study, including power and learning-evolutionary

theories. The former is particularly useful for understanding one of the main barriers to change that interviewees in this study identified: challenges presented by change-resistant sociopolitical contexts. The latter is advantageous when applied to the critical intersection of development *in* community and development *of* community. These applications will be discussed herein.

5.3 The Politics of Empowerment

“Power theories visualize a dominant group that has the power to make changes in its interests without the consent of others”(Schmid, 2004). In many community contexts this dominant group derives their power from “legacy” and often acts, as one interviewee so sagaciously deemed them, as “confounding bastards” to practitioners trying to disrupt the status quo in an effort to make change. A critical challenge of development practitioners is finding ways to disrupt or augment these traditional power structures in order to devolve power from an elite core to the surrounding populous for the purpose of development of community.

On the surface, the goal of development of community seems reasonable and noble. So why then is this intention often met with such resistance from local power elite? The notion of interdependence may be applied to understand this core challenge.

Interdependence, the cyclical tendency to impact and subsequently be impacted by, undergirds power structures that span a variety of scales, from individual community members to elected government officials. Power held across these scales by a variety of actors is inherently interdependent in the way that affecting one actor’s power will affect another’s in turn. In particular, political status quos driven by a centralized allocation of power may be impacted by the devolution of power related to development work. In many cases, an alteration of the status quo or empowerment of certain factions of a community may result in less power afforded to those that have historically

held all of the power, such as local elected officials or planning agency directors with significant legacies in their organizations.

Though change-resistant sociopolitical structures may pose challenges for community development practitioners attempting to catalyze a change process built on empowerment or capacity building, an awareness of power theory may prepare them to engage with these challenges throughout the change process. Further, for astute practitioners, this phenomenon mandates developing a thorough understanding of the political landscape that they seek to operate in, as questions of “power or development for whom” become critical. Schmid (2004) illustrates this sentiment by stating, “Every interdependence creates an externality and the... issue is who creates externalities for whom. Where interdependent interests exist, choice of whose interests are to count is a power issue.” With this in mind, building strong relationships for the purposes of creating conversation and establishing common interests becomes even more vital in a professional practice built on enabling change. As bridging relationships are formed, the community field is strengthened, and thus, stakeholders are more able to create change with different but intersecting interests in play (Bridger and Alter, 2008). In this way, by helping to cultivate relationships between various groups and levels of power in a community, a community development professional may anticipate and even avoid the push-back that often comes about when the power-elite are challenged.

5.4 Development *of* and Development *in*

Dexterously navigating local power structures is of critical importance for community development professionals seeking to fill the role of community capacity builder, and as this research indicates, at the heart of capacity building is the goal of empowerment. Specifically, the empowerment of local people to be the “heroes in their own community stories” speaks to the necessity of development *of* community

as a core component of change work.

Development *of* community inherently relates to development of individuals and their relationships with others. This often takes the form of facilitated development in which professionals interact with a community in ways that seek to help the community identify their own needs, and then recognize what assets they may already have to address those needs. This process may be underscored by education initiatives aimed at enabling citizens to become more engaged in political processes in an effort to build their agency to affect change in their own communities, as well as other social service-type programs that seek to alleviate financial or temporal stresses for working parents and other community members.

A key result of capacity building in and empowerment of local communities may be evident in the effects that these things can have on the socialized power and stigma that afflicts many low-income communities that interviewees in this study cited as a barrier to change. This phenomenon, reminiscent of the third dimension of power presented by Lukes (1974) may be a source of quiescence in some community contexts (Gaventa, 1980). Thus, by empowering individuals and helping a community to cultivate individual and collective agency, quiescence may be overcome and opportunities for change may happen over time. This process is largely reflective of a mobilization of Schmid's (2004) learning-evolutionary theory in which, "The process of change results from a continuous change in that reality which results in changing the perceptions which in turn induce the players to modify or alter the structure which in turn leads to changes in that reality- an ongoing process." Again, interdependence and an interactive relationship between elements of a change process surface as a theme that unites the findings of this study.

Similarly, that interdependence is also present in the relationship between the necessity for development of community and development in community in creating

sustainable change. Though practitioners identified empowerment by way of development *of* community as a key component of their professional role, it is important to note that these efforts may be most effective when taken on alongside efforts to increase development *in* community. To emphasize the importance of aligning development *in* and development *of* community, it is worth reiterating one practitioner's point noted in Chapter 4 about the necessity of relationships that bring together these efforts. He stated:

We have to learn to partner at a very high level so that those of us who are highly focused on human development and those who are focused on physical development can all sit down together and plan on parallel tracks and see how we can improve each other's outcomes...We have to look for ways where the projects can touch each other, integrate, leverage strengths, mask weaknesses. Let's do that and stop shutting each other out. Collective impact is a huge piece of how we get work done

This development *in* community typically refers to the physical development, or pursuit of technical or structural solutions, like job creation, infrastructure improvements, or ecological management. In all cases, development *in* community has less to do with empowerment and more to do with addressing surface-level issues. These structural improvements may enable and reinforce the effect of capacity building efforts. Likewise, efforts to build capacity may make structural change much easier to sustain.

This concept is exemplified in the *Paint the Town* story in the way that efforts to make structural change, i.e. painting the wall and implementing the community garden, functioned as ways to involve neighbors in bettering their own space and giving them greater ownership and agency in their own community, while at the same time, the involvement of these neighbors ultimately contributed to the success and

sustainability of the painted subdivision wall and community garden. Together, the development *in* community and the development *of* community interacted in ways that lead to an overall shift in behaviors in the community. By applying the learning-evolutionary theory of change, we can understand that this change in structural reality contributes to changing socialized power and community members' perceptions of their own agency, which may lead to more positive structural changes, and so on. With this and other findings, the conclusion can be drawn that it is crucial for practitioners to strike a balance between providing technical solutions and utilizing local capacities and knowledge in order to affect sustainable, local change.

5.5 Expertise: An Expanded Conceptualization

Finally, in relation to this balance between providing expertise and utilizing local knowledge, it is crucial to examine the nature of the community development professional as an “expert” and recognize the power that is inherently ascribed to this expertise. Community development practitioners are widely considered to be experts in relation to the communities they work with, as their training is often such that they are endowed with technical skills that reinforce this expert standing as it has been defined by a historically positivist standard, i.e. one that values the empirical or measurable elements of expertise (Fischer, 2000). As evidenced by the aforementioned importance of technical solutions focused on development in community in reinforcing developments of community, this technical expertise is undoubtedly necessary for supporting change processes in the community development field. It is important to note, however, that the findings of this study also suggest that technical expertise alone is not sufficient for being a successful agent of change. Things like empathy, patience, tenacity, and an ability to build strong relationships do not align with the traditional, positivist conception of expertise, nonetheless,

they are critical components of personal practice for a professional wishing to be successful in making change. The idea that in order to maximize their effectiveness in contributing to community-based change, a practitioner must expand their skillset to include non-technical skills that adhere more closely with a post-positivist framework of expertise is a major takeaway from the findings of this study.

This realization has important implications for organizations that train and produce community development practitioners. The findings of this study suggest that in addition to equipping practitioners with technical expertise, greater emphasis must be put on cultivating non-technical skills in order to fully enable them to be a successful agent of change. Breaking out of the technocratic mold and putting greater emphasis on social, political, and cultural understanding will enable community development professionals and organizations to better relate to localized change processes by way of relationship building, active listening, navigating complex political power structures, utilizing local leadership, and mobilizing local knowledge, all while functioning to empower communities and be enablers and facilitators of change.

Chapter 6 |

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the purpose of conducting this study was to explore what the process of creating social change looks like in a community development context in order to better understand whether and how change theories relate to community development practice. By considering this intersection of theory and practice, I hoped to address the broader question, “How can one individual make change?” and “How can that change be emulated and optimized?”

The research findings have addressed these questions herein, and have largely affirmed many theories of what constitutes an astute practitioner. Based on data collected from the sample of practitioners interviewed for this study, community development professionals were found to most commonly relate to local change processes as enablers or facilitators of change with the tools to build capacity and empower local residents to “be the heroes in their own community story.” Through a discussion of their experiences making change in their own community contexts, practitioners expressed that the most beneficial, enabling factors that commonly aid in successful change processes are strong partnerships around and within the community, establishing trust and credibility associated throughout their practice, and identifying and working with local leadership to identify and implement relevant and sustainable initiatives. Significant barriers to creating change are a lack of diversity

in change-making organizations, as well as deeply ingrained and change-resistant power structures, including structural and socialized power. Finally, key elements of professional practice that contribute to a development practitioner's ability to facilitate change were determined to be a prioritization of local knowledge, active and engaged listening when relating to partners and community members alike, and a deep engagement in their work underscored by empathy, patience, and tenacity. These behavioral and philosophical elements of professional interact in ways that serve to make the astute practitioner an effective agent of change.

6.1 Limitations and Directions for Future Inquiry

With these findings in mind, it is worth considering the limitations of this study. Though effort was made to include diverse perspectives from community development professionals working in non-profit, academic, extension, and local government settings, time and resource constraints limited the interviewee sample size to 12 practitioners, and thus, the findings of this study are not representative of the entire population of community development professionals. Additionally, though the findings of this study indicate how change processes can be optimized from a practitioner perspective, it is important to keep in mind that these findings stem from only a small sample of practitioners located in two geographic regions in Pennsylvania. Undoubtedly, variations of perspectives and personal practice would differ if the interviewee pool were to be expanded, or the geographic areas for participant selection were altered to include different sociopolitical contexts. Different contexts mandate different approaches to development, a point that should not be overlooked in the takeaways from this study.

Similarly, the selection criteria for participants in this study were necessarily broad and sought to include perspectives from a multitude of different organizations,

ensuring that the positionality of each interviewee in their relation to their community was varied. Had interviewees been selected from one sector, say, only professionals from cooperative extension, results of this study may have been subsequently varied. That being said, these findings tend to reinforce what we know about how to be effective in the community development arena, and thus are suggestive of the idea that the enabling factors and barriers to change, as well as elements of personal practice that contribute to practitioner success are worth being aware of in most contexts. Though the specifics of power structures, economic issues, environmental factors, and social and historical contexts may vary between communities, and practitioner practice may be impacted by organizational goals, the findings of this study speak to challenges and enabling factors that can reasonably transcend many of these altered variables and inform practice of astute practitioners operating in any community in a variety of organizational contexts.

These limitations to the study also inform areas for future inquiry. Particularly, it would be beneficial to compare and contrast elements of personal practice, enabling factors, and challenges presented in change processes across community development sectors. This distinction could potentially have interesting implications for the valuation and application of expert versus local knowledge and application of and interaction with theory if practitioners were examined through the lens of academic-affiliated versus non-academic affiliated development organizations. Further, it could be beneficial to expand the goals of this study to examine practice and relationship to change on an organizational scale, focusing on how community development goals and missions align with the findings presented by individual practitioners.

Additionally, a topic that was touched upon but not specifically inquired about in this study is how practitioners ensure the sustainability of change. This study suggests that collaboration between development *in* community and development *of*

community, as well as integration of local knowledge and leadership, may aid in the long-term success of change initiatives; however, it is worth asking what else may contribute to these successes being viable in the long-run. Inquiry into this topic would undoubtedly further inform elements of personal practice for practitioners and community development organizations, and would serve to supplement the findings of this study.

Finally, a critical question that lies outside the scope of the objective of this study, but is nonetheless fundamental for producing a thorough understanding of community development work and the change process that practitioners engage with involves specifically defining change. Throughout this study, the definition of change was taken for granted, and it was assumed that the reader conceives the idea of change in the same way that the researcher does, i.e. the act of making something different and presumably better. Further inquiry into the components of and process of change would be beneficial for situating community development in the larger landscape of change work and processes.

6.2 Final Thoughts

Throughout this study, community development practitioners are established as individuals with the capacity to facilitate and enable change in local settings. In their interviews, these practitioners spoke about the challenges that they face in their day-to-day work, as well as their approaches to addressing wicked or intractable social problems. Many interviewees expressed their frustrations with trying to make change related to these problems; they spoke about the struggles of tackling poverty amid systems that act to repress individual agency of low-income communities, about the challenges of conveying their technical expertise to affect change amid seemingly impossible tensions between municipalities, about the difficulties of implementing

initiatives without the help or energy from local leadership to sustain the change process, and about the personal toll that all of these things take on the practitioners themselves. Despite all of these struggles that were acknowledged throughout their interviews, all of the practitioners interviewed were united by one positive sentiment: the belief that one individual can be a force for change, and though one person may not have the capacity to end or even fully address a wicked problem, localized change matters. In order to affect large, societal problems, it is imperative to start small. In regards to wicked problems:

...It is unlikely that there will ever be one, emotionally satisfying moment when we can proclaim that the problem is “solved.” Instead, the best that we can hope for is gradual change and the requisite social and ecological learning that can accompany such change (Carroll et al., 2007).

Though this answer may seem obvious, understanding and internalizing it is imperative for a community development professional seeking to make a difference. Accepting that some issues may be intractable, and then recognizing that strong partnerships, trust, involvement of local leadership and perspectives, and elements of personal practice can contribute to an ability to instigate localized change despite this intractability may be a source of hope for practitioners motivated to be change agents for their own communities.

Appendix |

Study Questions

Context

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the work that you do?
- What are the goals of the organization that you work for?
- In your opinion, what makes your work “community development” work?

Experience and Change

- In your opinion, does a community development professional have a role in creating change, and if so, what is that role?
- What strategies do you use to use to promote change in your own work and what factors facilitate positive change?
- What are the most common challenges or barriers that you encounter in your work that prohibit change from happening?

Philosophy of Practice

- What motivates you to do the work that you do?
- What personal characteristics do you think are necessary for someone to be an effect change agent?
- What is your philosophy for approaching large, societal or intractable problems?
(potentially give example related to the work that specific interviewee does).
With problems this big, where do you start?
- To what extent do you believe that an individual can be a force for change?
Localized, large scale?

- Can you tell me a story of a time that you saw your work producing positive change? What did that look like? What did that feel like?

Wrap-Up

- Is there anything else about your work or experiences that we haven't touched on that you would like to share with me today?
- Having done this interview, do you know of anyone else that could be of interest to my project that you would suggest getting in touch with?

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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE:

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- Took classes in Wildlife Management, Ecology, Environmental Policy, and Kiswahili
- Engaged in field research, including a semester-long directed research project investigating the effects of climate change on gender roles in the Maasai and Hadzabe tribes of northern Tanzania
- Gained extensive experience operating SPSS statistical software and conducting in-depth key informant interviews with the help of a translator

Penn State Geography: Sustainability Across the Americas, Peru

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- Travelled to Peru as part of a Penn State Geography research program to study the effects of alluvial gold mining and ecotourism on local communities, economies, and environments

INTERSHIPS & RESEARCH:

Intern- Urban Water Innovation Network, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

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- Gained interdisciplinary communication and research skills while participating in an NSF funded undergrad research program dealing with urban water sustainability and human thermal comfort
- Conducted a full review of literature, independently designed research methods, and carried out experiments using Kestrel Weather devices

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- Worked with U of A Environmental Science Faculty to research sustainability and ecotourism
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Intern- Center for Global Studies (CGS) at Penn State

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- Authored press releases, newsletters, blogs, lesson plans, and other CGS publications
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LEADERSHIP:

Vice President/ Co-Founder of Fossil Free Penn State (FFPSU)

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- Initiated and currently help guide Penn State's student campaign for fossil fuel divestment
- Produce policy reports for administration communicating the organization's goals, coordinate outreach, and facilitate direct actions protesting socially irresponsible investments

Board Member on Penn State's Student Sustainability Advisory Council

August 2014-May 2017

- Appointed by the University President to research and present opportunities for progressive, sustainable actions and policy changes to vice presidents of the Board of Trustees, quarterly

Teaching Assistant/ Peer Mentor for RPTM330: *Backpacking Leadership*

Spring 2017

- Facilitated a weekly discussion group, planned and taught a group lecture about risk management, and served as a mentor for a group of 30 prospective AURORA leaders

Learning Group Leader for Penn State Outdoor School

Spring 2017

- Developed lesson plans for elementary environmental education programming and taught lessons that include basic biology and ecology topics such as: water and soil cycles, predator-prey interactions, animal adaptations, Pennsylvania natural history, and plant identification.
- Facilitated teambuilding activities and engaged in group management with the goal of providing positive outdoor experiences for students of diverse backgrounds

Trip Leader for AURORA Wilderness Orientation Program

July 2014-Present

- Lead groups of 10 people on week-long backpacking trips in PA State Forests and Olympic National Park as a part of PSU freshman orientation programs
- Engage in risk management, teach backcountry hard skills, and manage group dynamics
- Certified Wilderness First Responder, CPR & AED Certified

Team Leader/ Volunteer for Fresh START (Students Taking an Active Role Today)

September 2014-September 2016

- Lead freshmen on an annual day of service to volunteer at local sites and organizations, including: Boalsburg Mansion, Nittany Greyhounds, Penn State THON, and the Penn State Arboretum

AWARDS AND HONORS:

Keynote Speaker, Penn State Berks Undergraduate Research and Creativity Conference (2017)

Rock Ethics Stand Up Award for Ethical Leadership (2016)

College of Agricultural Sciences Emerging Leader (2016-17)

President's Freshman Award Recipient (2014)

PUBLICATIONS:

Hvenegaard G., & Kaiser A. (2015). Ecotourism, conservation, and sustainability: a case study of the Camrose Purple Martin Festival. *Innovative Leisure Practices: Cases as Conduits between Theory and Practice*. Volume 1. World Leisure Center of Excellence in Sustainability and Innovation, Nanaimo, BC: University of Vancouver Island.

Kaiser, A. (2015). The Real Disaster is Above Ground: An Exposition and Critical Analysis. *Community, Environment, and Development Undergraduate Research Journal*. University Park, PA: Penn State University.