Community Based Research and Education Curriculum Design

Supplemental paper prepared for Environmental Studies 400C
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by

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For my course project, I thought it necessary to engage in an endeavor that would result in some degree of positive social impact. Because the course focused on putting academic energy towards positive social change and action through community based research, I thought it would be appropriate to choose a project that gives back to a community in some way. I thought that creating an elementary school educational resource kit about the Clayoquot Sound Region would be an effective way to combine what I have learned about community based research with what I have learned about Clayoquot Sound in developing an educational tool kit to increase awareness about the incredible richness of the region.

During the eight days we spent in Clayoquot, I listened to local community members throughout our daily activities to get a feel for what they believe to be important values of their region. I also referred to the Long Beach Model Forest Society's report titled *First Nations Perspectives on Wildlife Inventories in Clayoquot Sound* (Beasley et al. 2000) and the Clayoquot Sound Scientific Panel's report titled *First Nation's Perspectives Relating to Forest Practices Standards in Clayoquot Sound, Appendix V* (1995). Both of these reports document places, plants and animals that are culturally significant to the Nuu-chah-nulth of Clayoquot Sound. Based on these sources of information, I decided to include the following four sections in the resource kit: general geographic and demographic information (in the form of an overview), central region Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, the temperate rainforest, and the coast and ocean.

This kit is intended for use in Grade 4 or 5 classrooms and serves to provide teachers with sufficient background information about each topic to give them enough confidence in the subject area to teach it effectively and be able to answer students' questions. The students and teachers who use the materials provided in the resource kit will gain an understanding of the culture, history, ecology, and beauty of the Clayoquot Sound region.

Although Tofino is only a five hour drive away, many children growing up in Victoria never have the opportunity to visit Clayoquot Sound. I will use slides of the region to provide the students with a visual representation of the topics included in each lesson, providing the students with a 'virtual' visit to Clayoquot Sound. A list of descriptions accompanies the 29 slides, so each slide can be identified.

This kit is an example of using the needs and values of a community to influence educational curriculum design. I believe that public schools in Victoria need to include Nuu-chah-nulth history and culture into their curriculum, but often don't have to resources to do so. Therefore, 1 have created this resource kit to meet that need. In designing the kit, I also took into account the cultural and ecological values of the Clayoquot Sound community. By including community determined traditional and modern values into my curriculum design, I feel that I am giving the people of Clayoquot Sound a voice - the power to educate children in Victoria about their valuable culture and ecological diversity. In doing so, 1 have created a project that benefits both the Clayoquot Sound community and the Victoria community.

Having outlined my project rationale. I will now elaborate cm broader applications of community based research to educational design.

In Adrienne Mason's report *Input from Youth to the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust* (2000), she exemplifies the importance of educating Canada's non-aboriginal population about aboriginal culture in order to eliminate racism and stereotypes. In gathering local student input on developing Biosphere educational projects, she found that Nuu-chah-nulth students wanted to learn about their own culture and language while at the same time they expressed an interest in making documentaries and web sites to share their culture and language with other children in hopes of eradicating stereotypes. This Clayoquot Biosphere Project is a great example of applying community based research to education design.

Mason showed respect and appreciation for the individuals involved in her project. She worked with teachers, parents, students, and administrators to gather input on what educational programs these individuals wanted to see in their communities. She met with them at their convenience, followed up on progress, encouraged continual input, and respected their input. Following these steps allowed for effective community/researcher collaboration and resulted in a successful research project.

Kushman's study on community engagement and educational reform in rural Alaska is another case study whereby researchers effectively combine community based research and education design (2001). Kushman believes that "(educational) reform efforts in small communities require and inside-out approach in which educators must first develop trusting relationships with community members, and then work with the community to design educational programs around the local place, language, and culture (Kushman, 2001, p.12)." Here, he views the educators as researchers and recognizes the crucial aspect of establishing *respect* when collaborating with a community. This

recognition of mutual respect is a common theme of effective community based research as we discovered in our course readings and field component. Using this type of education design - putting community needs first - educators can consider their students' culture, language, history, and goals when designing classroom curriculum. This will enhance local cultural strength and will empower more youth to be proud of their culture.

Many educators find great difficulty in defining a cultural framework for their curriculum (Skilbeck and Harris 1978). Whose cultural views should be represented in the educational materials? What cultural aspects will be used most effectively for educational purposes? Community based research is an effective method to find answers to these question. Stairs recognizes this in her analysis of Canadian Aboriginal schooling. She examines various case studies that she defines as "reports of ongoing highly participatory research by inside outsiders practicing collaboratively with Aboriginal educators in their communities as teachers, teacher-educators, program developers, language specialists, and in one case as a long-term researcher (Stairs 1994, p. 122)." The words "inside outsiders" truly encompass how researchers should approach community based research, establishing mutual respect and understanding by becoming part of the community.

Although there are inherent challenges in community based curriculum design, the case studies outlined above help support the notion that the hard work is worth it. The process can be time consuming, the decision making may be complicated due to multiple stakeholders, and the outcome may be difficult to assess. But by seeking continual community input about the educational design and their outcomes, educators

can gain feedback about the successes and failures of their community based curriculum design.

I believe that my educational resource kit exemplifies how culturally appropriate curriculum design can be achieved through an understanding of community needs and a strong desire on the researcher's part to develop effective, culturally accurate and fun educational materials.

Literature Cited

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