Richard S. Hansen, Ph.D

Provost, Union Institute & University

Comparative Urban Studies Project

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Fetzer Institute

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A Reflection Paper

Resilience and Education—A Link to Positive Results and Healthy Communities

Reflecting on the papers presented by Gross and Lederach, my comments will center on the role of education in the composite of variables that impact a healthy community. Whether viewed in the context of Lederach's place, safety, or voice or from Gross's perspective of the capacity to absorb, change or accommodate the unexpected, education framed in the context of social justice, ethics and social and global perspectives, creates a opportunity for action that positively impacts our communities. My premise is that colleges and university's, when outward facing, have an opportunity to provide graduates with a social justice grounding that can positively impact healthy communities

Specifically, I draw on my experience working in the adult serving Union Institute & University (UI&U) and its mission that speaks to engaging, empowering and enlightening learners. Degree programs are designed with learning outcomes that aim toward competencies at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels in communication, critical and creative thinking, ethical and social responsibility and social and global perspectives. Cross cutting these outcomes are the themes of social justice and ethics.

What skills does a graduate have in their tool kit when confronted with issues that impact their community becoming a healthy community? In Gross's thesis, resiliency stems from the ability of communities to bounce back, move quickly and act in a collaborative manner to impact change, or at the very best, to live day to day balancing the political,

social, ecological, geographical, sociological, educational and environmental variables that create a constancy of unpredictability.

 Healthy communities are influenced by individuals that bring a perspective of social justice and ethical behavior to the task. At Union learners are challenged to develop competencies that help drive toward solutions that in fact use community assets to positively impact social change. University learning outcomes of ethical and social responsibility and social and global perspectives combine to measure competencies that may directly impact our communities and, more importantly, healthy communities. For example, learners are required to address historical, sociological, psychological and ethical influences on the presence of difference among individuals, alternative identities, and social groups and encourage others to address these issues in their lives. Also, Union doctoral learners are assessed on their ability to evaluate alternative theories of power distribution of a society's resources. In addition, learners work toward a competency that speaks to defending equitable approaches for working with people within and outside the social majority, including prominent as well as diverse socio-economic and social-cultural constituents.

 I bring to the discussion two examples of Union Institute & University degree programs that illustrate my premise: the Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D) program and its relation to social justice and resilience and the Doctor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Studies (Ph.D) in which a cohort of learners from a particular community may pursue both individual and community building goals.

Example One: Resilience and Social Justice in the UI&U Psy.D Program

Consistent with Union Institute & University's mission and values, the Psy.D program trains its learners to promote the mental health of individuals and groups, and to promote social justice. Inherent in the definition of social justice is an understanding that not everyone has equal access and equal opportunity. Therefore, in enacting its mission, the Psy.D program has intentionally adopted a position of viewing mental health and illness from a larger contextual perspective, examining "problems" from an interpersonal,

sociopolitical and cultural context, as well as an individual one. This position allows learners to develop more robust versions of people's lives and see individuals as separate from, and resilient to, problems, and adopt a non-pathologizing perspective in their training. Learners develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to identify and address the effects of these overarching sociopolitical and cultural contexts, and work in clinical environments to combat racism, heterosexism, sexism and the like. This emphasis is evidenced in all aspects of the program, including curriculum development, and practicum and internship placements. All learners begin with a required course in "Clinical Psychology and Systems Theory," being presented with an overview of the profession, an introduction to systemic theory, and an understanding of the contextual nature of healthcare issues. Learners then have two required courses "Cultural Influences on the Self" and "Cultural Competence in Clinical Practice," examining their own lives, beliefs and clinical knowledge and practices within the context of the current literature. These courses provide a foundation for future discussions and critical examination of traditional and contemporary psychological thought and practices, not only in the program, but throughout the learner's professional career. All learners are encouraged and supported to find practicum placements within community agencies and organizations that engage in practices of social relevance. These include practicum placements where learners will be able to receive training and to provide psychological services to traditionally underserved populations in both rural and urban settings. Learners are currently in placements in community mental health agencies, prisons, nonprofit and volunteer organizations, as well as more traditional settings such as college counseling centers, hospitals and psychiatric facilities. Graduates of the Psy.D program will enter their community with grounding in social justice armed with competencies to positively impact individuals from a strengths-based approach and ultimately enhance both individual and aggregate community resilience.

Example Two: Community Problem Solving within the Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Studies.

The Union Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Studies has concentrations in Ethical and Creative Leadership, Humanities and Society, and Pubic Policy and Social Issues.   The outcomes of social justice and global perspectives described about are applied to learners in this program. The Ph.D is particularly suited for cohort groups from a community to participate and move toward their degree as a coherent unit. While individual learners will work toward their degree requirements, the cohort from a given community is able to work on specific community issues or challenges from an interdisciplinary perspective. A community issue or challenge might become the topic of four or five individual learners' social action research or dissertation. The impact of a community group pursing their degree with a design to research a specific community issue creates a potential to directly impact community resilience and the overall health of their community. For example, a cohort of learners is now pursing work in the area of Martin Luther King studies as part of their larger doctoral program. Within the seminar components of the program, focused study on the intellectual, moral, and political legacy of Dr. King is achieved in two ways. First, within every seminar (foundational, core, advanced) learners are expected to devote at least twenty-five percent of their study and assignments to an exploration of the seminar's content in relation to the ideas, ideals, and practices of Dr. King. Second, advanced seminars will be offered in each of the areas of concentration that have, as their primary focus, a more focused and sustained study of issues drawn from the corpus of Dr. King's intellectual, political, and historical legacy as related to one of the areas of concentration in leadership, public policy, and the humanities. This instructional model that facilitates both a group and individual study plan has direct applicability to working with community groups in pursuit of building a healthy community.

Purposeful curriculum development with competency outcomes that build toward resilience and an understanding of strengths-based problem solving has the potential to positively impact our communities.   By instilling graduates with a set of social responsibility and justice competencies, education contributes to the resilience capacities of inclusion and accommodating change and ultimately community resilience. Further, Union's approach to social and global perspectives delivered through an interdisciplinary pedagogical model provides a basis to elevate the impact of education as a variable that in Gross's view, creates an opportunity for healthy communities to thrive and become a

community that is resilient and has the capability to "bounce back, move quickly and act in a collaborative manner to impact change.

In closing and related to my two previous curriculum and program examples, I hold up the model advocated by Hanmin Liu in his *Commentary* distributed on July 31, 2008. The Union curriculum model provides the opportunity to positively impact the challenges noted by Liu. Liu has identified informal leaders as important in revitalizing communities. Specifically, he asks, "Is there an understanding of the role of informal leaders?" Liu posits that "these informal leaders work closely and collectively together to establish a leadership formation that is the backbone of a community."   Union graduates with the set of social justice and global perspective competencies and skills have the potential to understand how informal leaders work and impact their community working with a knowledge base that allows graduates to bridge the gap between their formal training and how the community actually works, thrives and grows.