Chapter 9
Cross Cultural Collaboration and Leadership: A Success Story

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ABSTRACT

A specific multi-tiered community-based system within urban Los Angeles can be used to create a particular cross cultural collaboration and leadership model. This chapter focuses on a case study where cross cultural aspects of collaboration and leadership exist and work together within a particular community. By analyzing the historical to present-day context of this community-based system, this chapter reveals a strong correlation with relevant theoretical framework and practice strategies from the interdisciplinary field of Negotiation, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding (NCRP). The system for collaborating across difference presented within this chapter alludes to the capacity of effectively creating optimal solutions for educational and other organizational community development. It makes a proposal how a combination of certain collaborative dynamics and aspects of the field of NCRP have the capacity to create effective means of support for students in the public school system.

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the various reform initiatives that are taking place within Los Angeles Unified School District (hereinafter L.A.U.S.D)’s educational system, one area we could look at as reform practitioners is cross-cultural collaboration and leadership. With the constant influx of programs trying to define what it takes to make an impact within the United States (hereinafter U.S.) public education school system, messaging can possibly get lost in implementation. One particular initiative occurring in Boyle Heights, California has been working to lessen this particular effect for the betterment of its youth.

One can cross the 1st and 4th street bridges from Downtown Los Angeles and find her or himself in the Boyle Heights neighborhood. A community surrounded by three major freeways (I-5, I-101, and the I-60), Boyle Heights would be considered to be on the east side of Los Angeles County. Not to be mistaken for unincorporated...
East Los Angeles (which is not part of Los Angeles County), Boyle Heights developed into a present-day neighborhood focused on grassroots community development, enduring the pressure of outside gentrification.

Even though the neighborhood is roughly 6.52 square miles in size (2014), its 14,229 people per square mile is one of the densest communities in Los Angeles County. Its school system dealt with overpopulation throughout the years until the early 2000’s where additional options such as new public and charter schools became available. Boyle Heights’ present-day school system includes a combination of twelve public schools through L.A.U.S.D, charter schools, and private schools. There are a total of five different public schools (one elementary, two middle, and two high schools) that are managed by an urban school turnaround organization (UTO). Even though these five schools are responsible for reporting to this UTO, they are still held accountable to certain L.A.U.S.D policies and procedures as well.

Through all of these bureaucratic layers, an issue that resurfaces is funding. With a population over 650,000 students and operating budget of $6.8 billion (Romo, 2014), there are still strict budgetary constraints throughout L.A.U.S.D. Public schools within Boyle Heights have had to become strategic with bringing contracted services onto their campuses. At times, some of its community coalitions have taken it upon themselves to help secure funding. One way has been through a federal grant called Promise Neighborhoods.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), the Promise Neighborhoods initiative was built to serve as a discretionary/competitive grant in order to create a successful educational pipeline for children by giving them access to fundamentally sound schools and strong systems of family and community support. Since the 2011-2012 school year, a community building organization in Boyle Heights known as Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission has been working to bring this grant to the neighborhood. Since that point, this organization had been unsuccessful in obtaining the grant. Regardless of its inability to obtain the grant, the organization did not stop its efforts to create that essential pipeline. As a program manager for a leading tutoring-based educational non-profit, I had the opportunity to be directly involved within this process; both as an observer and a committee member. I had also been able to identify certain members and organizations that put forth a dedicated approach focused on cross cultural collaboration and leadership.

To better understand the type of results that yield from a particular community collaborative alongside specific leadership techniques, this chapter adheres to the following structure. It begins with introducing historical context and the need for collaboration and leadership across conflict. It then transitions to discussing the theoretical framework of NCRP and its correlation to the community work. The closing sections focus on the evolution of the initiative over the course of a 4-year span. Ultimately, it takes a closer look at how this particular initiative has been able to create an effective infrastructure without the financial means of a federal grant, where other sites that were awarded the same grant have yet to make similar accomplishments.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Boyle Heights, a highly compacted urban community in East Los Angeles, started off as a culturally diverse neighborhood with multiple immigrant families. According to the East LA Interchange (2013), numerous Eastern European, Russian, Japanese and Mexican families were forced to this area in light of the segregation efforts of the local government and real estate industry of Los Angeles during the 1920’s. Moving forward and through the 1960’s, many of these immigrant families had already moved out, but many more Mexican families moved in. This influx of population eventually created crowded neighborhoods throughout the city.
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