Abstract

This Honors Thesis project was completed as a collaborative effort from three Honors College students who had participated previously in an immersive learning experience through the Teacher's College. This thesis illustrates Whitely, an exemplary community in Muncie that, despite several biases and stereotypes, has overcome many obstacles and hardships. Drawing upon the knowledge and perception the three students had gained from working in the Whitely community, they created a video. Through this video, the goal was to capture the opinions and experiences of Ball State students and members of the Whitely community. The history of the Whitely community is also explored as well as the reasons that biases and stereotypes may have developed, and the video explains how the Whitely community plans to eradicate them.
Acknowledgements

The three Honors students would like to thank the Whitely Community members for welcoming us into the community and providing us with an increased understanding of how a community works together in order to overcome prejudices. There were several members from the Whitely Community that took their time to answer our questions and share resources with us to create this project. The creators of this Honors Thesis would like to extend a special “thank you” to Wilisha Scaife, Michael Long, Mary Dollison, Cornelius Dollison and the Buley kids for agreeing to interview with us and sharing their community with us. Thank you also to the Ball State students who interviewed with us: Emilie Carrison and Emily Young. Finally, a special “thank you” goes to our advisor through this project, Eva Zygmunt-Fillwalk. We appreciate her willingness to provide guidance, encouragement, and support for this thesis project.
Author's Statement
Erin Lezon

My role in this project involved several tasks. I took part in interviewing the Whitely community members, elementary school students, and other students from the Schools Within the Context of Community (SCC) immersive semester. Also, I researched the history of Whitely and found pictures to accompany these events. With this information I created the section covering history in the video. Additionally, I recorded my own ideas and experiences on video to include in the final video.

Growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class town, I never was exposed to much diversity, and for that reason, I value my experience in Whitely. I am incredibly thankful that I was given the opportunity to learn about a community and become a part of it. Through my various experiences in the community, I have learned that this community is very compassionate and welcoming. Meeting my mentor, Otee Stills, who has lived in Whitely her entire life, and other community members was wonderful; all of them made me feel accepted. It was clear that they were happy to have us as a part of their community. This was obvious when I attended Union Missionary Baptist Church as well. Many people whom I had never met before gave me hugs and said how happy they were to have me there. It was a unique experience, unlike the calm, quiet, subdued religious mass that is familiar to me. Nevertheless, I was thankful that they were so open and inviting.

Additionally, Whitely, as a community, believes that education is very important, especially for the future of the students that live in this area. I have learned this through my interactions with the families of my students, the
community members, the faculty at Longfellow Elementary School, and the staff as well as the community members who visit and participate in the programs of the Roy C. Buley Community Center. They want so much for these children, and they make that clear. At the end of the Dream Unit, which the SCC program did with the 2nd graders at the Buley, we presented a video, created with the children. This Dream Unit video conveyed to us the personal dreams that the parents and community members had for their children and how they could reach them. Moreover, this video captured the significance of education to the entire community, which is one part discussed in our video in this project.

All that I learned during my Schools within the Context of Community semester in Whitely has impacted me so much. I loved getting to know this community and the people that live here. It definitely changed my attitudes regarding low-SES areas. I never realized that I carried the stereotype that parents or families in high-poverty locations do not value their children’s education. However, when it surprised me that they were showing a strong interest in their schoolwork and encouraging their children to do their best, I discovered my unknown bias. Since I recognized this bias, I have made an effort to connect with the families of all my students and involve them in their children’s education whenever possible. I feel that this is necessary because I need to utilize families as a resource. Starting with the idea that all families want to help their children succeed will be exceptionally more unbiased and effective than assuming that certain families do not value education.
This experience has impacted my teaching in beneficial ways. I have learned that working with the families and the community is extremely valuable, and it makes teaching much more meaningful. When students can connect to lessons because they are culturally relevant, they will have a greater understanding.

My time in Whitely has also changed my attitudes toward predominantly African American areas as well as those toward Baptist churches. I feel like people tend to view areas that have large black populations as dangerous places to live or visit, but that could not be further from the truth. Whitely is an amazing, loving, welcoming, honest, and giving place; its stereotypes are terrible and wrong. Furthermore, my experience at Union Missionary Baptist Church gave me a new attitude toward Baptist churches. It seems like they are often looked at as crazy and ridiculous, and from an outside perspective, that might appear to be the case. Yet, after learning more about this community and meeting several people, it is evident that they just express themselves differently. They are very passionate and proud, and they openly communicate their love and gratitude for God. This is not something to be mocked; it should be respected.

Our video discusses the strength of Whitely as a community, and this is illustrated by a historical event. As mentioned in the video, in August of 1930, Shaffer Chapel was the location of an all-night vigil that resulted from lynchings that occurred in Marion, Indiana (Goodall and Campbell 62). Reverend J.E. Johnson brought the bodies of these two African American men back to Muncie with the purpose of preparing them for burial (62). A white mob began to form, with the plan to take the bodies back and continue to harm them (62). However, Muncie’s black
community banded together with the support of law enforcement to protect the two bodies through an all-night vigil (62). They were successful, shown by the fact that the white mob never developed completely and the bodies were returned safely to Marion for burial the next day (62). Whitely continues to be a strong and united community, even with the prejudices and challenges that it has faced.

Additionally, Whitely has a clear and well-established mission for the people living in the community. This is illustrated by the Whitely Community Council’s seven goals: beautification, safety, education, employment, pride, resources, and publicity (Whitely Community Council). With these goals, Whitely hopes to develop a safer environment for its citizens, eliminate the negative stereotypes, and provide its students with a bright future.

Our interviews with other Ball State students who participated in the SCC program capture the change in perspective that can occur by giving the people in this community an unbiased and honest chance. People in the Muncie area, including students at Ball State University, hear negative stereotypes from others and fail to form their own opinions. Furthermore, when people actually go to Whitely for an event or program, they often see it as a way of “saving” these people. As Emilie Carrison describes in the video, an element of pity for the people living in Whitely typically occurs at the start, rather than a feeling of respect and an effort for collaboration. This attitude changes when people look past the stereotypes and assumptions in order to have their own experiences. When people see how loving and wonderful this community is, they cannot help but immerse themselves in it. I remember the first time I met the Whitely community members; they began telling
stories and jokes immediately. All of them quickly felt like neighbors, family friends, and grandparents. Overall, the people in this community transformed my definition of community immensely. Now I understand that a community can refer to a group of students at a school, an entire town, or even just a few blocks.

I hope that this video will open the eyes of Ball State students and faculty as well as Muncie citizens to the true Whitely: an amazing community full of true compassion and faith. I do not know how many times I have overheard a fellow student or friend describe Whitely as “ghetto,” “dangerous at night,” “a place where drug deals happen,” “the shady side of Muncie,” etc. These blind statements irritate me more and more every time. Often, people hear something from someone who heard something from someone, and so on and so forth. Most, if not all, of these people have never taken the time to get to know the community, and very few of these people will ever take the time to form their own opinions or make their own judgments. Instead, they will just assume that this stereotype is valid and there is no need to question it. Therefore, if this video can change the perspectives of even a few Ball State students, then it will have made a positive difference.
The Institutional Review Board has approved your Continuing Review/Progress Report for the above protocol, effective August 14, 2013 through August 13, 2014. All research under this protocol must be conducted in accordance with the approved submission.

Editorial Notes:

1. CR approved.

As a reminder, it is the responsibility of the P.I. and/or faculty sponsor to inform the IRB in a timely manner:

- when the project is completed,
- if the project is to be continued beyond the approved end date,
- if the project is to be modified,
- if the project encounters problems, or
- if the project is discontinued.

Any of the above notifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb). Please reference the IRB protocol number given above in any communication to the IRB regarding this project. Be sure to allow sufficient time for review and approval of requests for modification or continuation. If you have questions, please contact Sarah Ryle at (765) 285-5052 or sgryle@bsu.edu.
Works Cited

<http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=ROOT_CATEGORY&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=ms_r_f-2_s&gsfn=Amos+Nelson&gsln=Whiteley&msbdy=1838&msbpm_ftp=Springfield%2c+Clark%2c+Ohio%2c+USA&msddy=1925&msdpn_ftp=Whiteley%2c+Springfield%2c+Ohio%2c+USA&cpxt=0&catBucket=p&uidh=000&cp=0>.


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