

Defining Diversity: Creating Community

Midpoint Snapshot

Project Description

Defining Diversity: Creating Community (DDCC) is a two year participatory action research project developed through a partnership among Vancouver Island University (VIU), Tla'amin Community Health, and the Powell River Model Community Project. Designed to increase community capacity, resilience, and sustainability, the project promoted a two day course crafted to advance Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) within a safe and supportive space for reflection and dialogue; 71 people took advantage of the opportunity. The project has been actively supported and funded by a unique cross section of community organizations who collectively matched a grant from the Vancouver Foundation¹. The project method meets three goals and responds to the questions:

How does participation in educational experiences that include a deep exploration of the meaning and value of diversity in our community, combined with the introduction of asset based thinking, impact citizens? More specifically, how does the educational experience Defining Diversity, Creating Community impact each citizen's view of self, their relationships with others, and their capacity to contribute to the social and economic well-being of their community over time?

Goal 1 To increase the community's capacity, resilience, and sustainability by delivering an innovative two day program to diverse groups of citizens.

Goal 2 To spark greater citizen contribution and involvement in local social and economic activity.

Goal 3 To demonstrate the efficacy of this approach to social and economic change.

Project Methods

The project consisted of four two-day community education course offerings and participant surveys. Focus groups and a learning circle are still in progress. The intention of the survey and focus groups are to seek quantitative and qualitative evidence of attitudinal changes, actions taken to improve social and economic well-being, shifts in beliefs, and changes in working relationships.

¹ Vancouver Island University, Tla'Amin Community Health, Powell River Model Community Project, Powell River Region United Way, Powell River Diversity Initiative, First Credit Union, Powell River Friends of Film Society, Inclusion Powell River (previously PRACL), School District 47, Community Living BC, Powell River Community Foundation, Powell River Regional Economic Development Society, Powell River Employment Program Society, Skookum Food Provisioners Cooperative

Survey Results – Group A, B, C, and D

The survey response rate was below 20% making the results unreliable when it comes to generalizability. However, the information provided by those who did complete the survey is still valuable. A summary of the results will be provided in the final report.

Focus Groups A, B, and C - Common Themes – Snapshot

Three of four focus groups facilitated by third parties have been completed with an average of 30% attendance. (Table 1)

Group	Course		Survey Response		Focus Group Attendance	
	Registered	Attended	#	%	#	%
A	23	21	6	28.6	6	28.6
B	20	17	1	5.9	5	29.4
C	19	17	3	17.6	5	29.4
D	16	16	3	18.8		
Total	78	71	13	18.3		
Average	19.5	17.75	3.25	17.7		

Table 1: Participant Data

Emerging themes were organized to help understand the impact of participation in the educational offering on participants in response to the research question. This report provides a snapshot of each theme. Selections of direct participant quotes appear in the text boxes. We also recorded specific contributions participants made to social and economic well-being, their ideas about the future, and their input about changes we could make to the course, *Defining Diversity, Creating Community*.

RESEARCH EXPLORED IMPACT ON:

View of self
Relationships with other
Contribution to social well-being
Contribution to economic well-being
Capacity to sustain contributions

Impact on View of Self

Without exception, participants noted a shift in their own perspective about other people, those people's uniqueness, and their value as community members. They felt more knowledgeable, respectful, and curious

about people different from themselves and more aware of one another's distinct history and experience in our community. They also felt more articulate about the nuance of difference.

In addition, many participants could articulate some measurable increase in their sense of responsibility for others in Powell River often giving

For me, I have a good grounding in community development, so it wasn't new, but what was very new for that piece was getting in touch with the whole residential school experience and the whole experience of people in my community. (Group A, Participant 2)

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.... there was a gentleman in town who holds up a sign that he will work for food, and I've seen him throughout town quite a few times. I thought I would be supportive and go actually talk to him and see what he has done to actually get a job and become part of the community. He said it's just from face value. He looks a different way than most people. He has got tattoos on his face and he says it is a really hard icebreaker and people don't really want to give him that (____) so I talked to him a bit about a couple of places that I knew that would probably look for someone who would labour. After that, I told him about Career Link, and I actually gave him ten dollars. (Group B. Participant 2)

specific examples of conversations they had initiated about diversity and change, actions they had taken or new volunteer roles initiated.

Participants attributed the high impact of their experience to issues we have broadly named locatedness. Their experience was contextual and took place in a learning environment specifically crafted to create safety, engage, and foster personal reflection and interpersonal connection. The energy created in the space by the demeanour and style of course leaders was frequently noted. It allowed for difficult conversations including conversations

about conflict and violence to emerge in the context of mutual respect and peace. Participation of First Nation's elders was especially powerful. Participants appreciated the focus on the process of exploring topics together with no predetermined outcome. Some participants noted their own greater sense of identity as a citizen of our region and in some cases, a citizen of the world. Others noted the impact of the importance of the specific location for courses like this as well as for other events in our community². Some participants noted similar issues of locatedness as making a difference in the experience of marginalized individuals in other settings.



For me and for diversity, there needs to be an invitation, but there can't be a solid agenda. You might all get together to talk about one thing, but if you have already determined the outcome, then there is no invitation to be open or to listen or to have anybody to contribute. So I think that it needs to be organic. You put out the invitations, but let the process do its thing. (Group C, Participant unidentified)

John Louie

Impact on Relationships with Others

Participants spoke about the impact the course had on their relationships with one another and with others in the community. They talked about their expanded relationships and their concern for those who remain lonely and isolated. They believe ongoing prejudice and discrimination remain barriers to a sense of belonging and well-being for some citizens. Participants noted greater connections with one another and

² Note – course deliveries were intentionally scheduled at different locales including Tla'amin Community Health, Ocean View Education Center, and Vancouver Island University – PR Campus.

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felt that their experience had deepened and/or extended their networks across traditional divides like age, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and ability and created connections between agencies, groups, and services previously operating more like silos. Participants acknowledged the inclusiveness in our region and sense of belonging.

After coming here, I made friends with some people that I thought were a little bit different and I didn't really think I would. Now, they are some of my best friends at school, and I hang out with them every single day instead of just the people I always hung out with. (Group A, Participant 6)

There was such a diverse cross section; lots of connections were made, young and old, native and non-native. It was like a little microcosm of what you want a whole diversity of initiative to be. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

I am going to pay more attention to the United Way, now that I know that [Participant 5] is on the board. I see [Participant 6] in the car in the parade and it is like, I know her, now I made connections around business. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

... there is a lot of stuff that goes on in town, and it is quite diverse. But yet, it is like an underbelly of lost-ness of different folks that I just could never get why it doesn't jive. (Group A, Participant 1)

However, they also frequently expressed concern for citizens who continue to experience loneliness and isolation and spent time in the focus groups examining some of the possible causes and solutions. Participants were concerned that prejudice and discrimination still exist in Powell River and limit the social networks and supports for some individuals. As they grappled with their concern which was largely for individuals who live with a disability and for older people, they also noted the untapped potential for contribution from these same groups.

... some of the folks I work with, it is difficult to have them in groups at times because people ignore them. It is not a good feeling ... I think about the unconscious reasons why prejudice and discrimination continue to exist ... we have to start working at the roots of prejudice and discrimination because there is as much oppression going on now; it just looks different. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

I see extremes. I see the extremely busy and then I see the extremely lonely with nothing to do. It seems to be one or the other quite often; it doesn't seem to be balanced. So somehow tapping into all the lonely seniors out there and make[ing] them feel like they have purpose. [might help] (Group C, Participant 1)



Arlette Raaen and Olivia Murphy.

Impact on Capacity to Contribute to Social Well-Being

Almost all participants articulated an increased capacity to contribute to social well-being in our region or felt invigorated in their ongoing efforts. This result was in contrast to the confusion they expressed about their role and contribution to the region's economic well-being. Most participants were already connected to social development or readily talked about their work. They embraced conversations about overcoming barriers and problem-solving issues like reduced funding, insufficient time, policy constraints, duplication of service, and long standing divides.



(L to R) Malerie Meeker, Anne Celila.

I start looking at the glass half full philosophy. If we can't do it on the left, let's try it on the right. It makes you think more creatively. (Group A. Participant 1)

Impact on Capacity to Contribute to Economic Well-Being

Participants struggled to articulate the impact of their educational experience on their capacity to contribute to the economic well-being of our region. This was in part due to their more individual or personal focus on their own survival and the survival of their loved ones.

In addition, the language surrounding economic well-being was foreign to most and was seen as bigger or outside of their purview. They tended to understand economic well-being within the very traditional norms defined by capitalism and had not considered alternatives.

Participation in the survey and focus group did contribute to a broadening of the definition of economic well-being, however, feedback was so clear in this section of the research that we revised day two of the course to support Group D participants to better understand and embrace their capacity to contribute to our economic future. Some information about this shift is available on the DDDC blog site at this address: <http://wordpress.viu.ca/ddcc/2014/07/21/defining-diversity-creating-community-may-3-and-4-2014/>.

....I worry about my kids in the sense of economic development already. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

... [I'm concerned about] folks that are close to living below the poverty line (Group A, Participant 1)

I don't think I have ever thought about economic development, except for my own probably. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

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The economic one throws me for a loop ... how do you increase the economics? Where do you get it going, how do you start it off? I get stuck there all the time. (Group A, Participant 1)

Through my lens, when I hear the words economic development or when I engage with people and that term comes up, it's almost like my knee jerk reaction and in my kind of peer group, it is synonymous with politics. It's political. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

Participants were definitely concerned about the economic future of our region and wanted to help; they just weren't quite sure how .

They struggled to identify how they could contribute to the broader community in part because their definition of economic well-being was quite narrow.

The focus group provided an opportunity to expand thinking about economic well-being. Facilitators and the researcher provided some input about alternatives economies and various viewpoints. The course was subsequently revised by Malerie Meeker for the last delivery.

This dialogue quickly moved to new ways of thinking about community assets including food security, an emphasis on reduced carbon footprint, and cooperative models rapidly emerged.



(L to R) Laura Cocksedge, Trina Bailor, Gauri Nair, Ryan Little, Brendan Clark.

I think we have to start by redefining our measurement of economic success. (Group A, Participant 5)

It's as many as 4 million people in this country that are considered to be food insecure, which means they either can't afford or can't access healthy, sufficient, safe and culturally appreciate(d) food. (Group B, Participant 4)

I've begun to carpool and offer my vehicle to drive people around to and from work, or whenever I'm available to do so, so that the emissions, carbon footprint in the environment isn't so bad. I've taken the time to tell people who don't recycle that I would sort and take their recycling for them, which is non-profit for me. (Group B, Participant 2)

There is a group of us that got together and we did childcare chits. So we each made up our own ... and we then just traded childcare with each and you just paid for it with a chit. (Group C, Participant 2)

Capacity to Sustain Contribution Over Time

Participants' voices surfaced several themes about what they believe increased the capacity of community members including themselves to sustain their contribution so the social or economic well-being of our region over time. They talked about the importance of sharing stories and experiences and the need for a central location or resource to reduce silos and avoid duplication of effort. They believe that small contributions create a ripple effect and thereby promote larger scale change. This idea is supported by the community partners involved in the project. Participants are interested in engaging a wider group of citizens in the course content, especially business people. Like many before them, they see involving youth as key to a positive future; however, this theme is balanced with an emphasis on all citizens taking personal responsibility for change now! Participants appear increasingly committed to exploring alternative economics and to an asset based approach.

Another theme, the ripple effect, is interesting because of its alignment with Wheatley and Frieze (2006)³ whose work inspired this project. They described asset based actions and emergence as a method for system or community change.

Hope was often a topic that segued to discussions about the importance of engaging youth as well as some ideas about how to do this.

Ripple Effect

If you could take what was in that room and bring it out into the community ... it would be really sweet (Group A, Participant1)

I think it has a potential to create a new lens for people and change the frame of reference they are using. So, instead of just looking in, they are then looking out. ...it does have the potential to shift whole communities. (Group A, Participant 5)

....sometimes it can be a tiny little thing that will either have a trickle effect and other people will join in or just that one tiny thing you have done is enough for that day. It is better than having done nothing. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

The word hopeful keeps coming to mind. Hopeful, you know like, it keeps coming to mind for me because I believe we can make a difference. (Group C, Participant 3)

Share Stories

It's really interesting to hear peoples' stories, and I find that people need to tell their story of their life again and again and again... I think it is important from the perspective of diversity in creating community that needs to be honoured in how we listen. (Group C, Participant 2)

³ Wheatley, M. & Freize, D. (2006). *Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale*. Retrieved from <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html>

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Ruby Barclay.

The final set of excerpts demonstrate the impact the project had on shifting perspectives and ideas about roles and responsibility for the social and economic well-being of our region.

Start Younger / Engage Youth

... I thought it would be kind of cool [if] this sort of material [was in] high schools or whatever so that it is always an ongoing dialogue and it never goes away. (Group A, Participant 1)

I think you have to start at a young age, younger than [Participant 6], developing resiliency in your community and individually. The world is moving and changing so fast as it is, that we need to be able to adapt and I think if we start really emphasizing adaptability and resilience, then when people get together, they won't be trying so hard to hold onto the norm and what they are used to. (Group A, Participant 5)

Shifting Perspectives

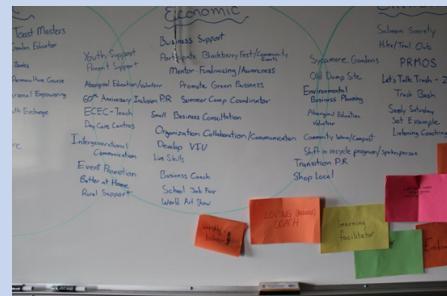
That was the first time I had really listened to anybody talk about asset community development. It made a lot of sense. It made me start thinking a lot about, especially my own workplace. How I can make people understand assets better. (Group A, Participant unidentified)

I think that by having a better understanding or a better list of our inventory so that we can reach into that inventory or reach into that well to use, modify and change some of those programs that we have today that need adjustment or we need to create new ones. I think we have to start by redefining our measurement of economic success. (Group A, Participant 5)

Well, self-sufficiency is more; I mean economic growth is not sustainable. It's not sustainable for the health of everything and everyone. But, if you create self-sufficiency or what you can leverage to contribute in smaller ways,those small things that we do every day and those little small things can accumulate to be something really big (Group A, Participant 5)

And I got the fireworks in there because I thought every individual person should be celebrated. (Group B, Participant 2)

The whole way of thinking in the asset-based community development and the coming together in community and just all mixed together and it's been a mindset that I've been developing and putting out there. I'm seeing it more and more everywhere I go. (Group C, Participant 1)



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Work from the Groundswell 2014 Conference - an example of the "ripple effect".

Actions Taken

Participants who attended the first three focus groups identified 47 specific actions they had taken since their participation in *Defining Diversity, Creating Community*. They saw the ripple effect of their actions as important. This list is included in the full report.

New Ideas

Participants also shared projects or further actions they believe might positively impact our social and economic well-being. See Table 2.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Students volunteering▪ Eat healthy local food and get involved with farming folk▪ Sunshine Disposal not renewing contract – recycle crisis – write letters▪ Holding a diversity workshop or fair at the school▪ Diversity meet and greets▪ Point system for businesses for diversity – food, service, how community involved they are.▪ Horizon Business Award for diversity▪ Incentives for attending the course▪ Handing out PR Dollars in goody bags▪ Posters / bumper stickers / Canucks promote diversity / Spokesperson for the community▪ Punch cards for local businesses – like a student card "Diversity Loyalty Card"▪ Join global movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Improve DDCC course, especially day two▪ Holding a diversity workshop or fair▪ Using food to engage youth▪ Food as a catalyst for connecting▪ Jam sessions as another catalyst to bring people together▪ Employers freeing up employees to volunteer on paid time▪ Cooperative Neighbourhoods – shared childcare, etc.▪ Childcare chits or credits▪ Diversity Cake or Ethnic Food events. (Food as a catalyst to bring people together)▪ Carlson Club as a gathering place. Build on their r fundraising model.▪ Employers give back by allowing staff to volunteer a portion of time each week/month during work time
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Table 2 - Participant Ideas



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Summary

Project findings indicate that providing an educational experience such as Defining Diversity, Creating Community has a powerful impact on participants individually and collectively. Measurable shifts in individual perspectives and roles, and increased responsibility are well documented and are largely credited to the qualities of the course summarized under the theme importance of locatedness. Collectively, groups felt better networked with one another and more able to extend their network. They felt energized and able to take actions that impacted social well-being. They developed strategies for sustaining citizen contribution over time including sharing experiences and stories, involving youth, centralizing information about volunteer and other opportunities, and continuing projects like this that shift mindsets. They confirmed that many small shifts and actions can result in large scale change. Participants explored the meaning of economic well-being and began an exploration of their role. Participant insights inspired and contributed to an important curriculum refinement that will increase course impact. The efficacy of an educational approach to social and economic change is demonstrated by the richness of the findings to date. Focus Group D and the learning circle will provide final opportunities to collect data and gain insight from project participants. A summative report including conclusions and recommendations will then be produced.