

APPLYING ANTHROPOLOGY FROM THE ACADEMY: AFRICAN AMERICAN DRUMMING FOR COMMUNITY WELL BEING

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Abstract

Applied Anthropology developed out of a consciousness and a sense of responsibility for using anthropological skills to work with and for communities. Applied anthropology as practiced within academia is a relatively young branch of anthropology and is still trying to find a comfortable place within the discipline itself and the academic arena as a whole. This article explores the intricacies and negotiations inherent in academically applied anthropological research through an example of a community-based research project with an African American drumming organization. The emphasis is on the process of applied anthropological research and the intricacies involved.

Introduction

The presence of applied anthropology in academia comes from a long and complex history and continues to struggle to find its proper place. Whereas there is a long history of anthropologists using their skills to impact real life problems, doing so coming from the academic arena, rather than the private sector presents its own sets of challenges and intricacies. Not only does applied anthropology struggle within academia in general, it struggles to define itself within its own discipline of anthropology as well. The ensuing article explores the process of applied anthropology as practiced by an academic anthropologist. Specifically the article presents steps and actions the author had to negotiate as she engaged with a research community. As the research is ongoing, emphasis is on the process rather than the final analysis and outcome, which are still forthcoming. The goal of this article is to highlight the complexity of applied anthropology as practiced in the academy and to contribute to the dialogue about applied anthropology's place and value within the academy and the discipline itself.

There are many terms to identify applied anthropology including action anthropology, community engaged anthropology, activist research, public anthropology, participatory action research, and so on (Ervin 2005). They do not all mean the same thing. There are nuances in practice, level of community involvement, and methods used. Throughout this work I use some of these terms interchangeably to highlight that applied anthropology is a dynamic and ever progressing discipline.

Applied work has always been at the roots of anthropology. Whereas its early roots were found in service of colonial authorities, imperialism, and war efforts, it has shifted significantly over the years to a discipline that now is dedicated to stand with those it studies and aims to contribute to the empowerment of those populations and communities (Hale 2006). Considerable self-critique and reflection have contributed to this shift. Unfortunately a great rift remains between the academic and practice-oriented branches of anthropology.

The most common critique of applied anthropology from academic anthropology is its atheoretical approach. In comparison to academic anthropology which is dedicated to a cultural critique, applied anthropology is ultimately dedicated to effectiveness. Hale (2006) explains the frustration:

Proponents of cultural critique driven by the search for ever-greater analytical complexity and sophistication, object to the politically induced analytical closure that action research often requires (2006: 101).

The theoretical dilemma is not as clear cut and binary, however. Many of their values appear to be in direct opposition of each other, yet the theoretical orientation of academic anthropology which

strives for analysis and insight in fact infuses a rationale for action-oriented anthropology (Hale 2006, Nolan 2003). Why bother with finding a space for applied anthropology in academia? Why not leave applied anthropology outside the walls of academia in the private sector?

Proponents of applied anthropology believe that academic anthropology has something to offer the ‘applied’ world. The argument is that anthropology’s academic insights and rigor have a special value. They argue that applied work is shaped by theory and that theory shapes questions, design and methodology (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006, Ervin 2005). Theory is also shaped by its application, and there are many examples of how theory is shaped and reformed by practitioners and community members in the course of community engaged research (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006). Ultimately, the use of theory leads back to its goal of effectiveness and being able to contribute to effective outcomes (van Willigen 1984). Applied anthropologists purport that a “theory of practice” can and should lead to an ethics of action which goes beyond scholarly engagement with social issues and instead ought to be supportive of “active involvement in pragmatically addressing the problems we help to illuminate” (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006:1985).

Part of the theoretical struggle is that practice oriented anthropology is more likely to use non-traditional theoretical viewpoints, which are specifically dedicated to ‘decolonizing’ or otherwise destabilizing the status quo. Hence it is these theoretical viewpoints and driven methodologies that come from the margins of academia and are always in the precarious position of having to establish and defend their legitimacy. Black Feminist Theory, Indigenous Knowledge Theory, and Third World Feminist Theory are examples of theories born out of minority voices inside the academy, that have tried to claim a space and have found a comfortable fit in applied anthropology.

The theoretical approach that guides this particular research draws from Black Feminist Anthropology, Native Anthropology and Indigenous Knowledge Theory. Black Feminist Anthropology draws from Black Feminist and Third World Feminist approaches as it acknowledges the role of the researcher as a woman of African descent. This position acknowledges a “situated identity” that derives its theoretical lens from a lived experience and social position in the world (McClaurin 2001, Hill Collins 1991). Black feminist theory provides a specific methodological approach, the strongest aspect of which is a continuous self-awareness of one’s own position in reference to the participants studied. This approach further supports a self-reflective voice and encourages a commitment to create work that can be used for the empowerment of people. A Third World Feminist approach adds the perspective that black women’s lives are not homogenous and are complicated by transnational forces.

Indigenous knowledge informs this work as it – similarly to black anthropologists – has called for a “decolonizing” approach to social science research (Harrison 1997, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Tuhiwai Smith (2008) explains:

From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power (2008: 58).

An indigenous theoretical perspective then acknowledges that our communities of study might have a different set of values and worldviews from the dominant mainstream. It further recognizes that how knowledge is constructed, shared and passed on might be different (Castellano 2000, Hart 2010). Consequently, respecting and aligning oneself with these differences, building relationships, and offering reciprocity are key methodological ingredients (Wilson 2008).

Native Anthropology lastly refers to an anthropologist who does research on his or her own population. Abu-Lughod (1991) has coined the term “halfies” as those “whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage (138).” She highlights that those of us with personal yet complicated links to the population of study face special dilemmas in negotiating the border between self and “other,” but also have the opportunity to provide special insights.

Self-Reflective Position

I have to start off by stating that I am a woman of African descent. I have over 20 years of experience in community based work, mostly as a community artist and secondarily as an activist. I have lived in low income African American communities for a significant amount of time. As an active participant in those communities I have been embraced as a member. I am not American however, and although I am well comfortable and familiar with African American culture, there are times when my viewpoint and experiences diverge.

As an immigrant I have been “adopted” by a host family with strong traditional Native American and African American traditions. I have lived in a low income African American community where periodically researchers would come by wanting to learn about addiction, poverty, or other social ills my community was supposed to demonstrate, only to be never heard from again. I have witnessed the discontent of community members who resented being treated as guinea pigs for the university. I have witnessed public and private, formal and informal ceremonies and rituals where people had to confront and release a sense of oppression and marginalization.

For both my Master’s and Ph.D. research I studied “my own people.” I studied working class African Americans, and Afro-Surinamese people, respectively. Both my personal life and my research taught me that I should not take the position of a “native anthropologist” for granted, however. I learned that even though a “native position” might presume privileged insider status, a “native anthropologist” still has to carefully negotiate their insider/outsider status. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Narayan (1993) reminded me that my status consisted of a dynamic identity shifting in a field of “interpenetrating communities and power relations,” and came with a great burden of responsibility.

I learned that my insider/outsider position status also played a role in the academic world, where my theoretical viewpoint was often on the margin of mainstream academic thinking.

In the course of those 20+ years I established a relationship with Mr. White, the founder of the River City Drum Corp in Louisville, Kentucky. His wife adopted me as her god daughter while I was an undergraduate student in college. I witnessed the birth of the River City Drum Corp as I witnessed the birth of Mr. White and his wife’s courtship that led to their marriage. Mr. White and the “Drum Corp” were family.

I also witnessed Mr. White and other Drum Corp members’ dismay at the release of a book about them. Anthropologists had visited and hailed them as a model organization. The anthropologists left and almost a year later sent the book as a thank you. The thank you gesture was received as a confirmation of an exploitative act however, especially as the city and name of the organization was kept anonymous. This was a standard anthropological procedure, but was perceived as a disrespectful act none the less.

This is the starting point and context with which I started to engage with Mr. White and the River City Drum Corp on a research project. I knew I had earned Mr. White’s respect over the years as a family member and as a fellow community artist and activist. I had convinced Mr. White of the great possibility of using the academy as a resource for his work. I had explained the role applied anthropology could play to help his organization. Although I knew Mr. White trusted me, I also knew how the African American community – that all members represented – felt about university researchers. Even though I was considered as “family” by many members, I also would represent the university throughout this proposed project.

I recruited five inexperienced but passionate students to serve as members of the research team. In addition to negotiating my position I had the responsibility to provide the students with their learning experience and help them negotiate their own positions in the field.

The Project Plan

The River City Drum Corp (RCDC) was created by Mr. Edward White in 1990 in Louisville, Kentucky. Initially a project of the Parkland Boys and Girls Club, the drum corps started as a group of boys who learned to build their own drums from PVC recyclable materials and how to play them. Since then RCDC has grown into an organization with a parent organization, an education and cultural curriculum, a dedication to young people and the overall uplifting of the African American community. The organization consists of youth members, parents, elders, family and community friends. Parents are required to be involved. Elders are grandparents, but also non-related elders from the community who feel an affinity with the organization.

Structured by a yearly calendar of practices, performances and workshops, the highlight of the RCDC schedule is the DaVille Classic, a percussion spectacle associated with the Kentucky Derby. The DaVille Classic was first organized by Mr. White in 2006 as an inspirational event for various youth drum corps and the African American community. The DaVille Classic is a gathering of regional African American percussion youth marching bands, which receive professional drum clinics in the morning and perform in a showcase in the afternoon. The event is paired with a college fair and performances by at least one Historically Black College and/or University (HBCU) marching band. The emphasis is on sharing rather than competing.

The DaVille Classic has been the inspiration for the formation of the MidWest Percussion Alliance. Rather than an annual event, Mr. White envisioned an ongoing commitment between the regional drumming organizations to purposely develop knowledge and skills as a way to use percussion to help young people on a path toward higher education and away from violence. Core organizations who committed to membership are located in Louisville (KY), Dayton (OH), Columbus (OH), and Evansville (IN). All the drumming groups work with African American youth from predominately low to middle class incomes. They work in cities and communities where African American populations struggle with socioeconomic issues. Additionally Mr. White sought to develop a model that could be shared with other communities.

Mr. White requested research assistance in the following items:

1. Investigating the necessary steps to the successful formation of the MWPA.
2. Developing a successful model of how to use cultural arts to help youth pursue higher education and avoid poor life choices.
3. Once the model was designed, disseminating it throughout the respective drum communities and other African American communities which could benefit.

Mr. White identified three issues he would like to see highlighted: 1.) The cultural significance of drumming for the African American community; 2.) the potential educational significance of drumming; and 3.) a successful model for the formation of a collective.

Stepping into Community Knowledge

The Indigenous Theoretical Perspective which has developed as an outcome of extensive exploitative relationships between researchers and Native communities stipulates entering into a research relationship based on respect of cultural values and knowledge that might be quite different from the researcher's background and training (Wilson 2008). In addition, I was personally aware that many research communities are offended by the outside knowledge and "understanding" that outsiders bring into the community. In this research then we first started by establishing the knowledge base we were stepping into. I guided the research team to use participant observation and connect with the adults of the RCDC to get an understanding of the knowledge base of the research community. The community knowledge was compared and added to a literary knowledge base students were required to read.

Prior to the drumming workshop series the RCDC came to Saint Louis to attend an HBCU drumming event similar to the DaVille Classic. The event was paired with a college fair and participation from a few youth groups and one elder drumming group. The research team attended this event and took participant observation notes. After the event the research team went out to eat with RCDC and then had two informal focus group meetings with the fathers and mothers of the RCDC respectively. Data from the event and focus group notes were used to construct a knowledge base and answer the question: How does the community think about cultural heritage, the value of drumming for education and institution building? The parents recommended a follow up meeting with community elders to make sure that the information we had assembled was legitimate. We scheduled this meeting and added this information to the knowledge data base. We combined the data from these meetings with our preliminary research and came to an understanding of how our research community thought about the issues of cultural heritage, education, institution building, family and community. Subsequently we identified three knowledge concepts that would be our focus for this research Cultural Heritage; Education, and Institution Building. Unable to separate family and community as a

different construct, we acknowledged that family and community were at the core of each of these and also the avenues through which we were to pursue our research.

Cultural Heritage

Drumming in the African American community has a history and legacy that reaches back to its origins in ancient Africa. The drum has long been known as a central musical instrument and element of African village life. In cultures where living in communal structures and relating to nature is central, the drum is a core means of artistic expression. Far beyond mere musical entertainment, drumming music has been documented as a provider of social and spiritual “glue” in traditional village life (Bebey 1975, Carrington 1949). Drumming along with singing and dancing is an engrained part of village life, accompanies every day activities and provides a means of connecting and communicating with the ancestors and spirits (Primus 1996). As such, drumming plays a central role in personal and communal well being. There have been contemporary studies that confirm the physical and mental benefits of drumming (Levitin 2006, Bain 1983). In this study however, the role of social and communal glue is more of an interest.

The RCDC parents expressed an appreciation for the connection drumming provided with an African heritage. “My son learns about his history. This is not something I could give him,” one father explained. Rather than a link to specific drumming or African traditions, heritage was linked to a communal history and “knowing who we are.” The elders talked specifically of a music history in Louisville city schools including marching and bugle corps in which both boys and girls participated. They reminisced about these music traditions that went beyond percussion and talked about the importance of those music performances for the school and the local community, instilling a great sense of pride. Both the parents and elders agreed that the drum corps provided an important link to heritage that unfortunately due to budget cuts was continuously being eliminated from the schools.

Education

The African American community has a very interesting and contentious history in regards to education. When Africans were brought to the Americas they were forbidden to read or write and teaching a slave literacy was severely punishable. In spite of these prohibitions, there were many enslaved Africans who learned how to read and write (Gundaker 2007). After the Emancipation Proclamation white missionaries came to the South to start schools for the newly freed populations. On many occasions they found that African Americans already had their own schools established and the white missionaries’ presence was not welcomed. Black colleges were being funded by the Freedman’s Bureau, many churches, and other religiously affiliated organizations (Albritton 2012). From the onset of the African presence on North American soil then, education was seen as something valuable and to be invested in.

As African Americans were not able to gain access to mainstream educational institutions, they had to rely on institutions specifically designed for them. Although designed for African Americans, they were not designed by African Americans, but rather by the white majority population. Historically Black College and Universities were created by land grants to accommodate African Americans. Within a climate of racism and segregation, land grant universities were awarded to support black education to ensure that black students would not matriculate into white institutions (Albritton 2012).

The initial land grant act of 1890 was followed by a period where HBCUs received little to no additional funding (Brown et al. 2001, Harris and Worthen 2004). These funding inequities were not addressed until the 1960s. In spite of the difficult circumstances, HBCUs were extremely successful in educating and preparing African American youth for society. A key element to HBCUs was their commitment to African American students beyond mere content education through addressing cultural self knowledge, racial uplift and community empowerment (Brown et al. 2001, Albritton 2012). Students were instilled with hope and pride and were expected to be a credit to their race and nation (Brown et al. 2001)

Elder RCDC community members decry the role desegregation played post Civil Rights in the downfall of the community. Students who in black governed classes were nurtured and guided were exposed to racist teachers who were not interested in their welfare. In addition, busing practices

contributed to a lack of cohesion in the community. Furthermore, higher education contributed to people leaving their communities behind. RCDC parents' views of education were quite different however. As one father explains, "I don't have that history of segregation and racism when it comes to education. I didn't experience that." The concerns of the RCDC parents were about their children doing well in school, having a chance to go to college, and not getting side tracked by issues that plague inner city schools. Their concerns were more about the lack of resources for schools and the large number of children underachieving because home and community issues such as violence and drugs impeded their learning. When hailing examples of young people who fell through the cracks of the educational system, all of the examples were of males. This is consistent with the educational literature (Jenkins 2006).

Education was talked about as a "way out" and a "way up," but more in terms of better access to jobs, rather than community or career development. RCDC parents also seemed less attached to HBCUs than the elders. Affinity towards HBCUs was more related to marching band and drum corps performances, rather than educational status. Parents were interested in getting scholarships for their children to go to college, but did not seem to care whether it would be an HBCU or non-HBCU institution. Even though the parents were committed to the value of education, they did give account of family and community members who saw education as a way for people to leave their community and their culture behind. It was not something that concerned them, but it was something they were aware of.

Institution Building

In the African American community the family is the first institution. And even though there are many families where both parents are not present, extended family and communal kinship-like structures have ensured the survival of African Americans in America (Stack 1974). The second most significant institution in the African American community is the church. From informal and covert slave churches to the present day, churches affirmed humanity in an inhumane world. Churches also provided the space for practical support and organized action contributing to the empowerment of people, with the Civil Rights Movement as one of its most famous examples. The church has played a significant role in educational institution building. For a population that received subordinate status before the Emancipation Proclamation and long thereafter, institutions from communal families to churches ensured people's survival. African Americans have a long history of creating and using novel, self-created institutions as they were denied access to standard institutions. Whereas individual families might not have the resources to fully prepare youngsters for the heavy demands of the real world, communal institutions instilled values and behaviors to ensure success.

Ideally the community supports and affirms the family and vice versa. In the 1980s a decline in African American communities and poor communities in general took place. Liberal economic policies were introduced that emphasized individual financial achievement over the common good. Marian Wright Edelman (1987), founder of the Children's Legal Defense Fund chronicles in detail how social pressures took their toll on poor and minority communities as jobs and higher educated people left inner city communities. With the introduction of drugs in these already destitute communities decline was irreversible. According to Cornell West (1994) the tangible decline in wealth, health and employment coincided with a decline in communal attitude and moral. The newly introduced "market morality" directly jeopardized social solidarity in the black community. Whereas people would pull together in times of struggle, the communal resolve had lessened.

As many communities have struggled with decline due to economic challenges, another institution has become more prominent in the African American community, the criminal justice system. As of 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Justice statistics, the incarceration rate of African American men is seven times the rate of their white non-Hispanic counterparts, while the female rate is three times that of their counterpart. In addition, the highest incarceration rate is within the productive age range between 20 and 39 (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). This other institution is an ever-present looming entity for the Louisville-based RCDC. Everybody knows stories of young people in the community who "did not make it" and either died or ended up in jail. These are not stories from television. These are everyday stories.

Casual conversations about drum corps alumni “who made it” are also interspersed with stories of those who didn’t. Here again stories are predominately about boys and young men. Girls who “did not make it” are talked about in terms of pregnancy and young men they are associated with. There are generally no stories about girls ending up in jail. The most visible leaders of community institutions are generally males, while the bulk of workers, especially volunteer workers are female. It was interesting to hear that mothers talked about their heavy load volunteering and supporting positive institutions, while some of the men comment on how women are too overprotective of their children, especially their male children. There is a sense of urgency to develop the programs and institutions that are available as a countermeasure to the life conditions that lead to participation in “the other institution.” As one of the guests at the director’s meeting stated, “Not everybody can be an NBA player, but anybody can be a musician.” Education, fueled by drumming can be a way out and a source of hope for many African Americans, according to the leaders in the upcoming MidWest Percussion Alliance.

Engaging the Community

The research team consisted of students who self identified as African American (two), White (two) and Bi-racial Asian (one). Part of the preparation involved a discussion of race, including their own race, and the African American community they were about to get involved in. We also discussed issues of gender and created space where students could freely process their feelings about these issues.

The first meeting in Saint Louis with the RCDC helped to introduce the team to the RCDC group and have an informal focus group. In addition RCDC parents were asked what kind of questions they felt the research team should pursue. The hanging out, sharing food and discussion of this first meeting created a comfortable opening for the four following drumming events where the team fully engaged in collecting data through surveys, interviews and participant observation. The research team attended a total of five drumming events in Saint Louis, Dayton, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Louisville, respectively between March and April 2010. They performed two focus group sessions, 17 individual interviews, two group interviews and 120 surveys. Periodical reflection and review sessions allowed students to actively participate in steering the trajectory of the research.

Sharing the Knowledge

Based on our data collection we were able to do a preliminary analysis and present these findings to the community. These findings provided initial insight into what worked well, what didn’t work well or incongruities, and what still needed further investigation. The difficulty of course was in determining how to deliver the information about the incongruities. As an anthropologist, this was one of the difficult points of negotiation.

The two difficult findings we encountered were the dynamics of organizational leadership and gender. How were we going to present these findings?

Applied anthropology is dedicated to the empowerment of people. The challenge is to figure out how to most effectively contribute to that empowerment. Failed development projects have taught us that sharing our acquired “wisdom” has not always produced the most effective course for change and may even have led to disastrous effects, no matter how well researched and informed that “wisdom” might have been. Black feminist scholarship stresses the role of responsibility and accountability and would steer me to point out and address the inconsistencies head on. Also, from a native anthropologist perspective, I would agree believing that “bad news” and honest news should come from within, from someone who cares about the community. This would fit with the important role of relationship that Indigenous methodology calls for.

As a native anthropologist, however, I was also keenly aware that I was never fully “in” the community and that the delivery would – while coming from within – also come from an academic representative. This community did not need an academic lecture about gender inequality. Also, merely lecturing people does not bring about change, even if people are hungry for the information. Furthermore, I found that as a native anthropologist – if I was really honest – I had a tendency for gatekeeping. I was protective of my population. I was sensitive towards impacting the community with negative information, but more so I was protective about the information that would go out.

Based on my personal and academic experience, I am very leery of how information about communities is used to harm, misrepresent and/or exploit them. The outside world does not need to know everything there is to know about a population. And so I realized, I might have a tendency to hold back, rather than want to lay it all out.

This personal dilemma was solved by the presence of my students. Whereas I might have hesitations in addressing or pursuing certain points of interests, my students are totally open. They don't have the filters that I have. I work on their sensitivity skills, but I also try not to rein them in too much. As a result they keep me honest and force me to look at things I might otherwise avoid. As a team we had thorough discussion as to how to present our information in a sensitive yet honest way that would be effective.

We decided on a "Things that work" and "Incongruities" format. We also decided to focus on the values that the MWPA had embraced and how the "things that don't work" represented actions that at that moment in time did not fit with those values. The first presentation of the findings was given to the RCDC and was mostly delivered by the students. This presentation almost had the feel of a family reunion and celebration as it also became the farewell party to the students.

The second presentation was for the leadership of the MWPA and was done by myself. The second presentation went deeper into the incongruities and how this information could be beneficial for future use. This presentation had a far more serious note and challenged me to stick to the data and not get personally drawn in, as leadership members had intended on using my data for certain organizational strategies as further discussion will clarify.

What Works

Cultural Heritage, Family and Community

The combination of cultural heritage and family/community was exemplified in various ways. The workshops at each of the drumming events stressed the heritage of drumming. The professional artists showed a range of drumming forms and styles ranging from conga to snare and even Indian tabla drums. The presenters explained the heritage of their instruments. One presenter in particular, Dr. Moses, the Director of Percussion and World Music at Central State University in Wilberforce Ohio, introduced conga drums, steel pans, and other percussive instruments. He gave an interactive presentation and had the whole audience singing and dancing along with African chants that had made their way to his homeland of Trinidad. Traditional African drumming and dancing were included in the showcase line up.

Even though the events were percussion events, dance performances were included, linking back to an African tradition where dancers and drummers work together. Other traditional elements were present. Audience participation and engagement as seen with Dr. Moses was a standard feature of all five events. The line between audience and participants was often blurred if not erased and contributed to a visceral experience of the event. At one event the MC pulled out several children, talked to them about education and musicianship followed by a "This is our future right here, everybody!" The audience responded screaming and waving enthusiastically. As drums were playing people would move in their seats and yell appreciation or even dance.

The acknowledgment and respect for elders was constantly modeled and practiced. Cultural heritage was also evoked as the RCDC acknowledged the elders in the community who had participated in drum corps or other music groups during their youth. Mr. White went as far as digging up black and white pictures of drum and bugle corps groups in Louisville from days long gone and put them on display.

Sharing food at the events strengthened the feel of family and community as people mingled freely. "Soul food," an African American tradition of sweet potatoes, fried chicken, greens, and other such foods was served and guests were invited to join.

Education, Family and Community

The theme of education was represented throughout the events in the college fairs, but also through the participation of college professors as workshop presenters and college groups as participants in the showcase. As stated, the MC repeatedly referred to education and its benefits. Both parents and youth members were well aware of scholarship and educational opportunities that might

result from participation. The drumming groups each have educational requirements and/or programs in addition to their percussion programs. The level of commitment ranges from GPA requirements to full tutoring to a full educational curriculum, depending on the organization. Both youth participants and their parents commented on the direct benefits of participation in the drum corp. Discipline, team work, and self confidence were mentioned most often in both interviews and surveys. The youth member survey with 50 respondents showed that participating in drumming helped students to stay focused on their education and provided them with vision for the future beyond their community. Having fun and making friends ranked highest in positive responses, followed by responses related to education. The audience survey also indicated an appreciation for educational opportunities. In addition to educational learning they rated learning about cultural heritage as highly valuable and connected learning to ‘staying out of trouble.’ Parents were most likely to mention the opportunity for college scholarships.

Institution Building, Family and Community

Even though Mr. White is the director of the RCDC, his role and commitment is often more of a father than a mere director. An alumnus of the RCDC who was a member of the original drumming group commented on how his early participation changed him: “It added to the core value that family and core people tried to instill in us. Mr. Nardie [White] wanted us to be able to do certain things. We booked shows and did all kinds of things. He made men out of us.” He continues answering the question as to how participation affected his family relationships: “Kept me away from not so good aspects of family life. Being a teenager and raised in a single parent household there was often conflict. This was one thing there was no conflict about ever. She didn’t mind me doing the drum corps, never had a problem with it.”

Mr. White’s fatherly role is not limited to young people however. The secretary of the MWPA refers to Mr. White as “Dad” and the other drumming directors also accord a certain level of deference not given to anybody else. The parental leadership style is not just limited to Mr. White’s role in the MWPA. Similar styles are seen in the individual drumming groups. Two of the groups (including the RCDC) have a husband and wife team, while the others are led by men. Clearly these leaders do not merely function as directors, but as parents given their responsibilities and emotional investments that reach far beyond drumming.

The leaders are dedicated to working together and share the same values of family, community and educational achievement. They all face similar challenges in their communities. Their events are well organized, with high quality workshops for their members. They are committed to unifying their voices, networking and using the collective to write grants and strengthen their respective programs. Besides percussion all directors deal with the complex issues that affect their families and communities.

Incongruities

Cultural Heritage, Family and Community

Dance performances were part of each of the showcases, which aligns with the African cultural tradition. With the exception of an African dance performance by a guest dance company, dance performances were executed by girl groups associated with some of the drumming groups. The type of dancing, however, did not match the vision of family and community values as put forth by the MWPA. African dancing does include body movements celebrating the woman’s body and fertility that might be seen as sexually suggestive. The dances put forth by the dance groups were hip hop style and at times so suggestive and mature that several audience members commented about its inappropriateness. At one of the showcases a dance group closed its dance with a shoot out scene where the youngest dancer pretended to shoot and kill all the other dancers. This display was a poor choice at an event geared towards uplifting communities already plagued by violence and caused some tangible discomfort in the audience.

As much forethought was placed in the development of the drum clinics and showcase, the dance participation seemed to have been an afterthought. There were no workshops for the dancers, nor was the vision of the event clear to the choreographers. Participation in the drumming events was heavily male dominant. Although this was not totally unexpected at a percussion event, given that the mission

of the MWPA is to uplift the whole community, there appears to be an indication that special attention could be given as to how to attract more girls to participate. The dancers were all female and hence dance appears to be an attractive way for girls to get involved.

Education, Family and Community

Even though the goal of educational pursuit and excellence is well promoted and internalized by both parents and youth members, the focus appears to be more on scholarships as opposed to college preparedness. Mr. White explained that the majority of his parents have steady jobs that they obtained when low and medium level income jobs were readily available. According to him, they do not understand the different kind of world that awaits their children, nor the urgency for the pursuit of a college education. They tend to not look that far ahead. As a result, parents as well as youth think about getting into college, but not necessarily about what is required to complete a college education successfully. He expresses his concern stating: "They send their children to college to take remedial classes. Some will be home for Christmas and not go back. They will have paid eight to nine thousand dollars down the drain."

The structure of the drum corps does instill discipline, focus and dedication, which will be a benefit once students enter college. However, additional support is necessary. Between two of the HBCUs that participate in the drumming events, one is known for being generous in awarding music scholarships. While the other HBCU, though more difficult to enter, is known for supporting and guiding the students once enrolled. Is this something to take into consideration when pursuing colleges? In addition, other questions arose as the result of the data collection: Are the college fairs the best source of inspiration? Are college professors the best source of inspiration? Are college students an untapped source of inspiration?

Other than promotional materials, college fairs do not really offer a realistic view of what college will be like for these youngsters. Furthermore, several of the workshop leaders were college professors. Though highly skilled, their talk was often over the heads of the participants. Youth participants ranged from elementary school through high school, and except for the hands-on skills training, the accompanying lectures were often lost on its young audience. Observation also showed that the interaction with the SIUE college students/research assistants who became regular fixtures were probably more effective in inspiring young people to go to college than lectures by college professors.

Institution Building, Family and Community

The majority of the leaders are committed to the vision and goals of the MWPA; however, there is a lack of wide-spread knowledge of the mission and vision. Neither the mission nor the vision was listed on the website, and even though people were generally aware of the goals and Mr. White's vision, they could not articulate the mission or vision of the MWPA. The MWPA envisions a joining of forces and knowledge to use percussion to divert youth from destructive life choices and pursue a path towards higher education. Two drumming groups in particular were more focused on short term outcomes such as joining forces to get funding or exposure. These groups were also the most competitive and left the MWPA at the end of this research.

Both the knowledge and work load were heavily concentrated. Within the organization the majority of the workload and vision lies in Mr. White. Within the River City Drum Corp and several of the other groups, the work load is concentrated among a few dedicated parents. As a result the parents are often overworked and near burn out. This was a common complaint from the parents across the board. For example, one mother expressed that she was grateful, but that the activities were time consuming and an all year affair. Another mother expressed her dismay about the unequal burden among the parents stating: "When you see those kids out there you don't think about who has to wash all those uniforms, iron them, carry and load the drums, and so on. It is a whole lot more work than sitting at a table and selling some tickets."

Not everybody needs to be as dedicated to the vision and mission as the leader in order for things to progress, as long as people do the work as agreed upon. Rivalry and attitude between some of the leaders and subsequently their members does have the potential to disrupt the institution building process. Not everybody focuses on the end goal. The group whose leaders were focused on outplaying

the other teams transferred their attitudes to their members. It was noteworthy that the groups who were labeled as having a “funky attitude” were the ones who did not return.

Because knowledge is concentrated, progress is slow. The five resulting groups that make up the MWPA function independently in their respective cities. Being consistently supportive and dedicated to sharing information for mutual growth is still mostly in the hands of Mr. White. If the one person that holds the knowledge for some reason has to divert his or her attention, then everything can come to a stand-still. The concentration of knowledge might also indirectly contribute to a more internally focused atmosphere. It is easy and perhaps comfortable to rely on steady support of direct family and friends and not reach out beyond the immediate community. Even though the events were well attended, the majority of audience members were relatives or people who had some intimate connection with participants or their parents. One can wonder if letting go of the reins could possibly result in a broader outreach.

Initial Conclusions/Themes/Suggestions

The findings of the research were used to introduce some initial steps and thoughts for a plan of action. The main recommendations focused on clarifying the vision and mission of the organization, and putting effort into making sure everybody understands and buys into the mission and vision. Subsequently, the members of the research team recommended to address the concentration of knowledge and workload and to determine how to redistribute both. The team encouraged the organization to keep doing what it does well, provide high quality percussion training. Team members also encouraged the MWPA to review some of the activities and make sure that they are in alignment with the mission and vision. In case they are not – as with the dance participation – how can they adjust? Lastly, the team advised the leaders of the MWPA to listen to family and community members and to spend more energy on promoting their work. Even though these appear simple recommendations, they involve major paradigm shifts.

In reviewing the goals set by Mr. White – investigating institution building of the MWPA, developing a successful model, and disseminating the model while highlighting cultural heritage – we concluded that an initial research step was taken, but that more work needs to be done. Significant data were collected on cultural heritage, confirming the role of family and community and an appreciation for African-based artistic expression. This information was used to comment on the issue of dance participation. The leadership was at an impasse about dance participation, with a majority leaning towards eliminating dance all together. The presentation of our findings that dancing was a significant part of the African cultural heritage and reached girls that would otherwise not be included at least provided room for further discussion.

More data needs to be collected on the educational significance of drumming. There is anecdotal evidence that the educational support is effective, but given the range in programs between the organizations it is important to get more specific information before any conclusions can be made. Specific numbers about high school graduation rates and subsequent college enrollment of youth participants also need to be collected, and was not available from every group at the time of the research. What has become clear is the significant role of culture and the confounding circumstances that shape and affect the work of the drum corps. There is a certain “how” in how MWPA drumming organizations direct their members. There is an underlying urgency that goes beyond the joy of drumming and includes a sense of fear of what might happen if youth do not participate. There is an involvement of family, recognition of elders and constant reminder of “where we came from.” There is honor, pride, and celebration of artistic cultural heritage. There are also gender inequalities and a tightly held parental leadership style that might impede progress. In spite these downfalls, MWPA drumming groups are each making positive impacts in their respective communities, hence it is foreseeable that they will be able to make a larger positive impact once they solidly join forces as Mr. White envisions.

Discussion

The findings of this research have given insight into the nature and potential of applied research. Similar to our presentation to the community, the lessons here can be regarded from a “what works” and an “incongruities” perspective. This research was a combination of academic and applied

research. “What works” is the fact that the university provides a wealth of resources that can find their way back to the community. Access to library information, grant writing, extra hands and minds (of students) for labor, expert knowledge and support from the SIUE Institute for Urban Research, for instance, can provide significant support.

Indirect benefits include the positive impact of university presence in the community. Underserved communities often experience university researchers as mere exploiters or otherwise people of little significance to progress in the community. The presence of this research team, particularly the students, was able to shift the perception towards the university institution in a more positive light. The repeated and active presence of college students made a difference. Students were welcomed and embraced as part of the family by the time the study ended. Having the students present and willing to share about their personal experiences of college also was well received. Similarly, seeing a primary investigator of African descent who cares enough to return to the community and sit down with the community to discuss the progress and results was experienced as something positive and significant. Indirectly then the research team interaction contributed to the educational goals of the RCDC and the MWPA.

Another positive accomplishment from the academic portion of this research is the amount of student learning that took place. As students expressed, they gained more intimate understanding of the African American community, themselves, and each other. One white student passionately shared how he felt he had been misinformed by the media and his education about African American life. The African American students in turn were amazed by different amounts of knowledge and familiarity with the research community between themselves and their fellow white students. It highlighted for them how segregated their upbringing had been. As such, they were forced to rethink what “community” really means, not just a research community, but their own student community and their place within the larger community. Their biggest learning was the enrichment of engaging with people and working alongside them; the lessons learned that no amount of class learning could have provided them.

One important lesson here is the meaningful role students can play in applied research. Students serve as ambassadors. Seifer and Calleson (2004) support this point stating that in many communities students are seen as less of a threat and of greater value, and are actually preferred over faculty research involvement. They state that for minority communities where the skepticism and distrust of research is especially high, student participation can make a difference. They also indicate that the necessary faculty–community relationships often start as a result of students engaging those communities through service learning assignments. Furthermore, students help the principal investigator to stay honest and focused as their presence and input hinders the investigator from retreating into certain habits of comfort.

Incongruities included the limitations due to academic structures. First, time is limited. True applied research that is committed to community improvement cannot merely rely on research contact. Follow up and working side by side to figure out the next step is essential, but unfortunately nearly impossible for an academically based researcher. The target populations of applied anthropological research are the underserved and marginalized, those who have been denied power and voice. These communities are often burdened by a multitude of issues that complicate their lives. Handing them a research report with valuable information with which they can “improve their lives” is not enough to implement real change. Expert knowledge and skill is available in these communities, but the lack of resources and support limits what these valuable community workers can do.

The literature on applied research consistently highlights time as a major obstacle. Being able to invest the time necessary, requesting time off, and extra time needed for publications that require community input are some of the major stumbling blocks to fitting applied research in an academic setting (Seifer and Calleson 2004, Young 2008).

Secondly there are unforeseen dynamics and events that can impact the community and consequently the research. The research team witnessed firsthand the impact of the leadership and vision of Mr. White for the Louisville community and all the other African American communities that were touched by his work. Mr. White was supported in his efforts by his wife and partner, Ms. Zambia Nkrumah, a seasoned teacher and community activist who devoted her time, passion and attention to developing the educational curriculum and parent participation module of the RCDC. As a strong couple they not only implemented the vision, they exemplified the image of the “mother and

father” at the helm that set the overall tone for the RCDC. At the end of the research, Ms. Nkrumah passed away due to illness. Her passing left a hole not only for Mr. White but for the RCDC and the Louisville community as a whole. The loss of an important leader takes time and as a result the progression of the MWPA has slowed down significantly.

Not only is the loss of leadership directly felt, given that the progress has been achieved on the backs of a few people who are usually functioning in a state of crisis and who juggle many balls, it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to implement major changes. People want change and progress, but communities who function in a state of crisis are often set in their ways. Change is not impossible, but requires a true hands-on partnership. It takes time, which is where an academic anthropologist falls short.

Another incongruity is the fact that even though a university institution has infinite resources at its disposal, it generally does not have an appreciation and reward system in place to support faculty in doing applied research (Young 2008, Boardman and Ponomariov 2007, Seifer and Calleson 2004). Applied anthropology and applied research in general is attractive for universities because it gives good publicity. It also attracts students to programs and public funding, yet the promotion and tenure system does not reflect this sentiment. Tenure and promotion policies have not caught up yet with more contemporary approaches to knowledge procurement and dispersion. Prestige is still obtained by intellectual pursuits, theory developments and publications, rather than a willingness to spend many hours working hand in hand with community members.

The traditional promotion and tenure process is consistently labeled as one of the greatest obstacles to applied research engagement. A study by Seifer and Calleson (2004) showed that in health profession institutions with a high commitment to applied research only 5 – 10% of professors engaged in applied research. Promotion and tenure, lack of academic leadership support, and insufficient time release were listed as major hurdles. A study of science faculty showed that junior faculty tended to avoid applied research even though they were interested, out of concern for the promotion and tenure process (Boardman 2007). In contrast, anthropology departments with a commitment to applied research in institutions with membership in the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology demonstrated clearly defined language and options in the promotion and tenure documentation that validated their work (Bennett and Khanna 2010). The number of programs in this particular study was small (five) but was seen as a positive indicator. Also, there are certain tracts within anthropology that are more easily acceptable for applied work such as business, medical and nutritional research (Young 2008). Perhaps these tracts can lead the way to broadening acceptance within anthropology.

In Conclusion

Applied anthropological research developed out of an understanding and a commitment that research should be about more than sole intellectual enrichment and that research could be done with and in service of communities. The most obvious location for applied anthropologists might be in the private sector, where research would be closer to the communities served. There is room for applied research from the academic arena however, and certain tracts are already leading the way. Academic anthropologists who are not governed by financial outcomes might be more suitable to stay focused on the outcome appropriate for the communities involved, and not on the funders. Academic expertise and other resources can find their way to communities to make significant impacts. Students can contribute and learn firsthand lessons they will never learn sitting in a classroom, from a book, or from a computer. Unfortunately, currently there are numerous structural hurdles that significantly impede the full potential of what can be delivered.

The hurdles are not just structural. The structure cannot be separated from attitude and mindset. Applied research represents a challenge to the status quo about how knowledge is generated and thus deemed valid. Studies refer to promotion and tenure track obstacles or the lack of leadership support, but often the attitudinal climate is affected on a closer level, among colleagues.

Academic anthropologists who engage in applied anthropology find themselves on the margin. Choosing to extend energy and effort into work outside of the academy over making theoretical contributions may come at a price. A lack of understanding, respect and support from colleagues may make for an isolating experience, which in turn can affect one’s academic performance.

Functioning on the margin as a minority in the academy and the discipline requires constant negotiation. Corntassel (2003), a Cherokee scholar, describes how he was labeled as an “activist posing as an academic” by his colleagues, and how though initially insulted he came to embrace that label. Coming from the margins we understand that the way we approach our work and what and how we produce goes against the status quo. But we continue in this marginalized position and negotiate our multifaceted identities because we believe we have something important to offer.

The change applied anthropologists are looking for is not just on behalf of local communities. Perhaps based on their own shameful history of colonial use and exploitation, anthropologists are dedicated to changing the academy into a better institution, one that is truly part of the community, and as a powerful community member who is dedicated to making life better. Universities can and should be better partners to their local communities. Like most institutional changes, such changes might be slow but they are forthcoming. As long as anthropologists keep chipping away at taking their work into the community, taking their students along with them, and bringing their work back home to help the university understand its potential, a change is going to come.

In closing we can reflect on the words of Mr. White which apply to the formation of the MWPA as well as the endeavors of this applied anthropologist: “I’m trying. I want to make it solid and viable. Playing the drums is just a vehicle. There is richness behind unity, the village. I want that to resonate into their lives.”

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