

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AT THE CENTRO COMUNITARIO DE EDUCACIÓN: NURTURING HEALTHY UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Miguel Zavala, Ph.D. • Anaida Colón-Muñiz, Ed.D. • Anat Herzog, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2012 as Librería Martínez de Chapman University, the space was renamed in 2015 as Centro Comunitario de Educación—prior to this the location was known as a private business (bookstore and art gallery), which presented opportunities and challenges as the space transformed into a hub for community education projects. Over the past five years, the Centro Comunitario has organized over 100 events and has served over 1,000 students and families, most of which are from Santa Ana. Specifically, the Padres Unidos parent education program has served over 300 children and parents. The Reading Starts Early program has served over 325 local preschool children. The Teen Mentoring Program/Futuros Brillantes has served over 70 high school students and 62 Chapman students. The adult classes have served over 120 individuals.

The Centro is a pre-kindergarten through adult learning center established by Chapman University's Attallah College of Educational Studies (ACES) in order to create a collaborative bridge to the predominantly Latino community of Santa Ana. El Centro's goal is to promote literacy and education for the Santa Ana community and its surroundings. In addition to being one of its founders, Dr. Anaida Colón-Muñiz has dedicated her professional expertise and heart to Chapman's Centro Comunitario, serving in the capacity of Director of Community Education since its inception, along with the assistance of Marie Carmen Ceballos. Despite limited funding, the overall success of the Centro is the outcome of sustained partnerships with Chapman university programs and community groups.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Chapman's University Centro Comunitario de Educación was founded upon the concept of community education (Eriksson, 2010; García, 2006; García, 2010) and public pedagogy (Brady, 2006; O'Malley & Roseboro, 2010; Roseboro, O'Malley, and Hunt, 2006). Together, these two concepts provide a rich, nuanced, framework for understanding and implementing pedagogical processes outside formal educational sites. Community education can achieve much in terms of the participation of the community to improve their own social, economic, and cognitive conditions through participation, reflection, and action.

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTERS

The most immediate impact of space and programs at a community education center can be measured by the number of people impacted. Over the past five years, 1,000 Santa Ana children, youth, and families have been directly involved in the programs that take place within the Centro.

The value of centers like the Centro are also important when assessed through the context of historical changes within the community, the most salient being gentrification. Gentrification is marked by urban renewal that often severs community networks and exacerbates access along race and class lines. This is most evident in Santa Ana's downtown area where the Centro is situated (González, Sarmiento, Urzua, & Luévano, 2012; Sarmiento & Sims, 2015). The Centro provides a space for community members to maintain networks and access, as well as relationship to one another and local institutions that partner in programs and services.

