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CCT Synthesis

# Teaching to Connect:

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Tying Reflection to Empathy Development in Civic  
Engagement Education



# Agenda

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- u Background
- u The Big Picture
- u Previous Research
- u Challenges
- u New Research
- u Teaching the Connection
- u Next Steps



# Governing Question

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- How might the impact of community engagement work, coupled with structured reflection, on the development of empathy and connectedness in students impact my work as a practitioner?



# Elements

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- Community/Civic Engagement in Higher Education
- Structured Reflection
- Empathy Development





"Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE)



# Elements

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- Community/Civic Engagement in Higher Education
- Structured Reflection
- Empathy Development





The IRI and its related literature defines empathy as the "reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another" (Davis, 1983)



# Why Me?



My own  
experience with  
CE as an  
undergraduate



My work as a  
practitioner





# My Questions

Essential Courses:

Design for Living  
Complexity

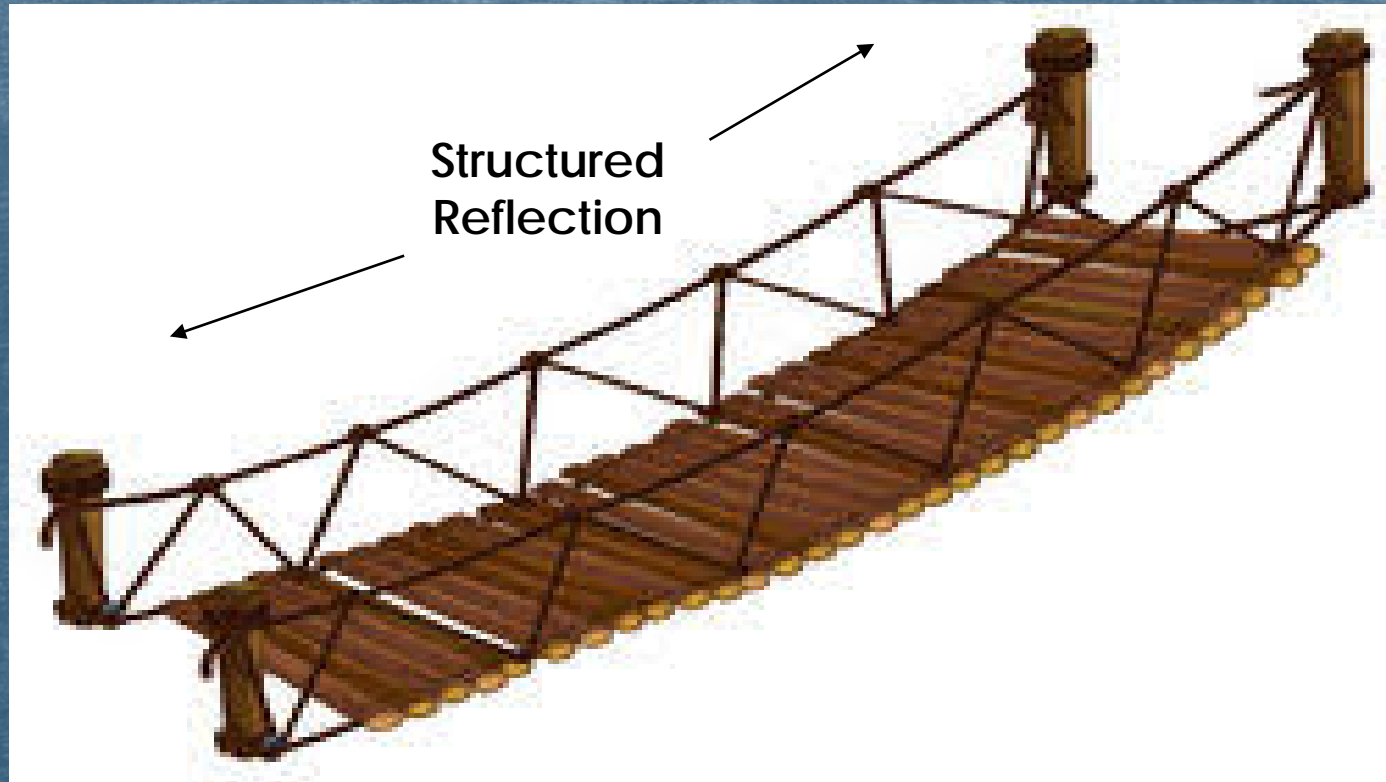
Civic Engagement in  
Higher Education

Processes of Research  
and Engagement

- What is the importance of connection in creating more just, equitable communities?
- How might community engagement help people develop empathy?
- If this matters, which I believe it does, how can we understand and improve the ways we help CE students develop empathy?



# The Bridge



Development  
of Empathy

Community  
Engagement



# Previous Research

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- Exploring what we know about CE outcomes RELATED to empathy, connectedness, etc.
- Exploring best practices for reflective practice
- Gathering my own experience and the qualitative feedback on the experiences of others
- Putting it all together: the synthesis governing question



# Answering the Unexpected Questions

- What do people think about when they think about empathy?
- Exercise

Empathy

Empathy is: Imagining you are the other person, putting yourself in their shoes and working to understand their situation.

(So — More than thoughts and prayers.)  
It's more difficult than sympathy (read: thoughts, prayers)

And more genuine.  
Very few actually even try to empathize, and why?

Because: all of us have our own problems  
all of us are ego-centric  
all of us are human.

It's human nature to say: Oh yeah? You think that's bad? ... and then launch off, whether verbally or inside your head,  
How much harder your own life/situation/day is.

• EMPATHY •

- kindness • openness
- listening • understanding
- unselfishness • patience
- thinking first of needs of others
- affirming their emotions
- using your compassion to affirm someone else; not striving to be empathetic by explaining your own experiences/emotions and how they relate
- leading with love







# New Synthesis Research

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- Quantitative analysis of trends related to empathy development in my POV102 course
- Use of data combined with qualitative work already completed to inform the development of my own teaching



# Interpersonal Reactivity Index

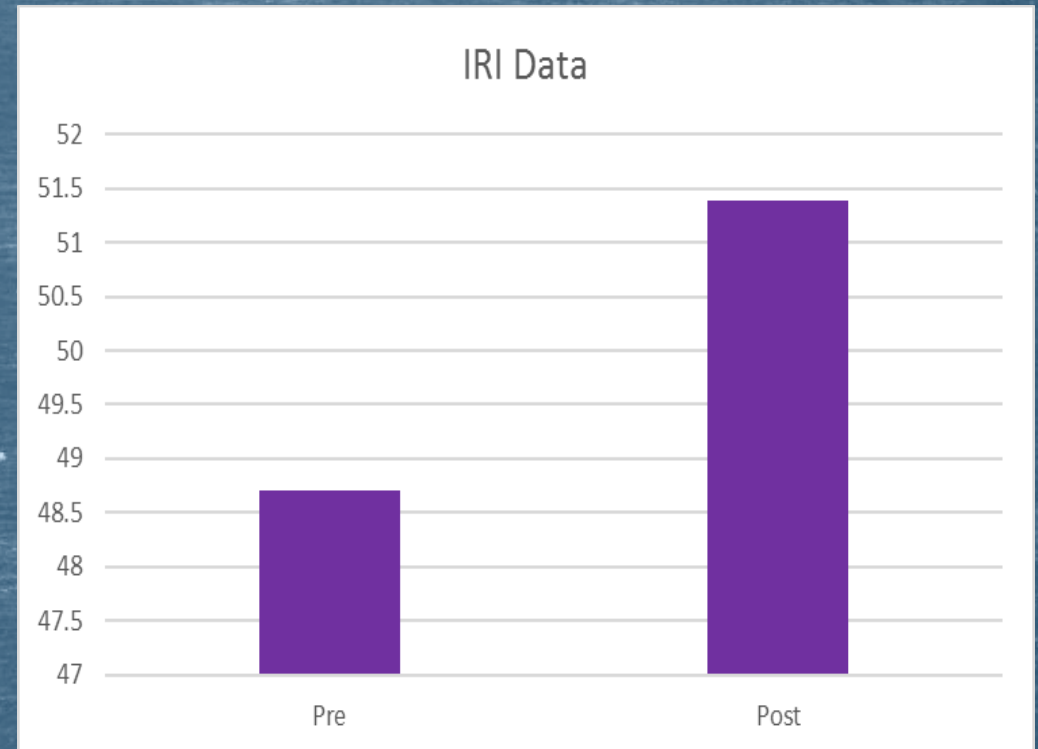
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- Focusing on change-over-time in
  - Perspective Taking (the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others)
  - Empathic Concern (assesses "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others)"
- The IRI defines empathy as the "reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another" (Davis, 1983)



# Findings- The Good News!

- ∪ Empathy can be taught!  
(maybe...)
- ∪ Increase in IRI scores from beginning of term to end
- ∪ Major Limitations:
  - ∪ Sample size
  - ∪ Lack of control group for teaching methods





# The Work to Come

What I Have Done	Best Practices	What Could Be Changed
Tying service to learning	Four C's	Greater connection to peers in classroom
Included many voices (community-partner expertise)	Dialog across difference	Structuring reflection in collaboration with students
encouraging critical thought around experiences outside of your own	Reflection in groups vs. in isolation	Explicitly sharing goals (re-shaping learning outcomes)





# Next Steps

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- Administering the IRI each term
- Evaluating effect of changes in structure
- Future research



# Questions & Discussion

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