The Journal of Extension

Volume 62 | Number 3 Article 35

9-15-2024

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Recommended Citation

Lipscomb, S., Brody, B. B., Pratt, M., & Frazier, T. (2024). Applying a Tri-learner Model of Extension Collaboration: Local-State-Campus Partnership. *The Journal of Extension, 62*(3), Article 35.
https://open.clemson.edu/joe/vol62/iss3/35

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Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgements We are deeply grateful to the early childhood professionals and community members who participated in the Malheur County Coalition, Roots of Resilience Trainings, and/or creation and dissemination of the Nurturing Resilience series. The Hallie Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families at Oregon State University and Malheur County Local Community Health Partnership provided financial support for this Tri-Learner project, and the Eastern Oregon Regional Educator Network provided local matching funds to support workshops and disseminate materials.

JOURNAL OF Extension Ideas at Work Volume 62, Issue 3, 2024

Applying a Tri-Learner Model of Extension Collaboration: Local-State-Campus Partnership

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Abstract. The Tri-Learner model of Extension Collaboration offers an innovative approach to address community needs and advance research by convening faculty from academic research, statewide Extension, and community-embedded Extension. This article describes development of a new Tri-Learner Model through an early childhood resilience project, with data from 32 participants. We present four key factors for the model's success: First, ensure that research and application are responsive to community needs rather than University-driven. Second, establish trusting, reciprocal relationships. Third, equally value each team member's knowledge and skills. Finally, leverage collaborative University structures and/or funding to foster reciprocal partnerships to maximize research impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Extension is called upon to help communities tackle complex needs across a wide variety of topics. Extension faculty embedded in communities depend on academic faculty or specialists to bring specific knowledge and evidence-based practices to communities; academic faculty often rely on Extension to support application of research in society (Radhakrishna et al., 2014). To improve responsivity of research to diverse and complex community needs, the field is moving away from directional expert-to-community approaches toward more reciprocal models of engagement in which researchers, specialists, and community members share decision-making, cocreate content, and leverage unique expertise and experience (Bertsch et al., 2020; Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2019; Crocker et al., 2022; Franz, 2003).

Although many university-based and Extension faculty and specialists embrace reciprocal collaboration (Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2019; Franz et al., 2010), it remains new and challenging (Radhakrishna et al., 2014). More research is needed to guide effective implementation. This article describes a novel Tri-Learner model that connects academic and Extension faculty with reciprocal learning that builds capacity for all: (a) academic research faculty, (b) statewide Extension faculty, and (c) community-embedded Extension faculty together with their local community. We describe the Tri-Learner development and application and discuss key factors to support replication and drive innovation to address other community needs of strategic importance.

THE TRI-LEARNER MODEL

This project grew directly out of a community need. Social service and education professionals in Malheur County, Oregon, sought to build resilience and address impacts of trauma for families with children. Malheur County professionals attended a workshop on a new evidence-based program called Roots of Resilience (Lipscomb et al., 2019), and given years of trusted relationships with their community-embedded Extension faculty, they asked her to help bring Roots of Resilience to their county. The community-embedded Extension faculty reached out to the academic faculty. Initial conversations led to partnership and creation of the Tri-Learner model.

The Tri-Learner model aims to better meet communities' needs, strengthen innovations/programs, and advance science by combining a community-engaged approach (Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2019; Crocker et al., 2022) with reciprocal learning within the faculty team. We fulfill this goal by bridging expertise in local communities (e.g., Malheur County) with expertise from academic research faculty and statewide Extension to collectively identify need

Table 1. Tri-Learner Model Learnings and Factors for Success

Overall: Key factors for success
Research and application must be responsive to community needs.
Establishing trusting relationships and reciprocity with the team is paramount to effective cocreation and collective capacity-building.
Each Tri-Learner team member learns, mentors, and contributes.
Explicitly valuing distinct expertise of all parties is essential to creating effective partnerships to meet community needs and advance research.
University structures and funding mechanisms can engender these partnerships.
Learnings for community-embedded Extension
Cocreating research and application with campus-based faculty builds capacity of community and community-embedded Extension to sustain and advance the work.
Partnering with campus-based faculty with specific expertise can engage new local partners.
Intentional collaboration and cocreation of resources with campus experts strengthens our ability to meet community needs.
Campus-based faculty value community-embedded Extension faculty's skill sets, relationships, and mentoring.
Cocreation and shared commitment lead to inclusion in scholarly outcomes.
Learnings for academic faculty (campus-based)
Cocreating research and application with community and community-embedded Extension faculty increases relevance, uptake, and impact.
Community needs point to gaps in existing research and application.
Dissemination of research and application begins with cocreation.
Community-embedded Extension faculty hold historical and contemporary knowledge of their communities that is essential for effective collaboration and impactful research.
Learnings for statewide Extension faculty (campus-based)
Community-embedded Extension faculty have strong skills in connecting with community across a wide variety of topic areas in ways that are aligned with the specific culture and priorities of the community.
Collaborating with community offers the opportunity to improve skills related to communicating and translating academic and policy jargon.
Partnering with community-embedded Extension improves transparency and increases our institutional knowledge of how the university is structured.

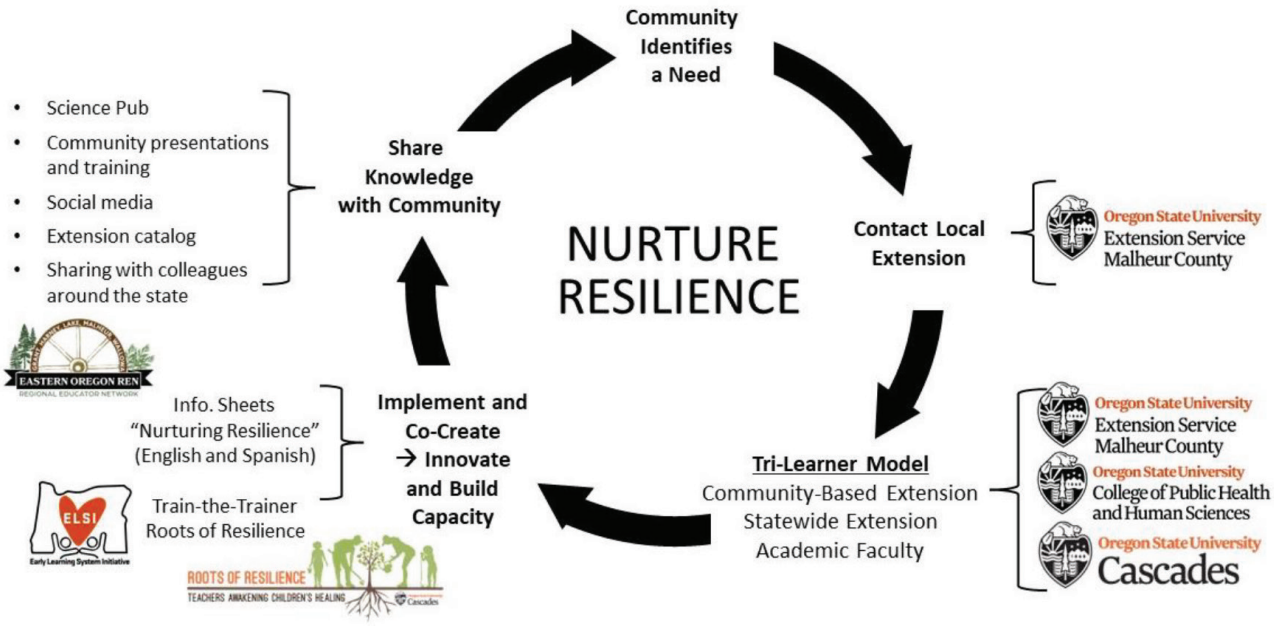

Figure 1. Tri-Learner model of Extension collaboration to nurture resilience.

and disseminate and implement evidence-based programs and strategies in ways that are responsive to local communities. We designed this project with a cocreation mindset (Crocker et al., 2022), and we use the term *Tri-Learner* to explicitly state that each of the three roles contributes, learns, and mentors one another. Table 1 illustrates this collective and reciprocal approach to learning and innovation by delineating overall learnings and specific learnings from the perspective of each role. Before discussing these lessons to inform other communities, we first describe the development and implementation of the model, as applied to one community with a focus on early childhood resilience (see Figure 1). This example illustrates research application. Future work should also explore the Tri-Learner model for other phases of the research process, including identifying research priorities and conducting studies.

To launch the Tri-Learner model, the team formed a coalition in Malheur County to guide the work of refining and addressing the community need. The coalition included community partners in migrant education, early intervention, social services, school counseling, and Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). The Tri-Learner team partnered with the coalition; the academic faculty contributed expertise in early childhood development, trauma, and resilience. The statewide Extension faculty brought child care policy expertise, a state-level perspective, and connection to Oregon's Child Care Research Partnership. This partnership led to stronger relationships among counties, generalizability of products cocreated, and participation of Extension faculty in the Child Care Research Partnership.

As the coalition set priorities, members requested that the Tri-Learner team begin by bringing Roots of Resilience training to Malheur County to build capacity and shared language among early childhood and social service professionals in addressing trauma and strengthening resilience.

IMPLEMENT AND COCREATE FOR INNOVATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Roots of Resilience is a professional development program for early childhood teachers in home- and center-based programs to strengthen resilience with children affected by trauma. The program guides teachers to consider trauma as a potential source of children's behaviors, to be responsive to all children in their care while also honing in on challenges that may be due to trauma, and to nurture teachers' own self-regulation and well-being. Originally, the program consisted of an online course and online video-based coaching (Lipscomb et al., 2019). In response to requests from the field, Roots of Resilience expanded to include online and in-person workshops. Roots of Resilience shows promising impacts on emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions and on children's engagement and learning in preschool (Lipscomb et al., 2021).

By using a Tri-Learner model, we not only disseminated Roots of Resilience in Malheur County but also spurred innovation within the Roots of Resilience program by cocreating new content, and we built capacity of the community-embedded Extension faculty and the academic faculty to deliver Roots of Resilience to meet community needs (see Figure 1). This example illustrates reciprocal learning in the Tri-Learner model. New content included (a) train-the-trainer model for Roots of Resilience workshops and (b) bilingual Nurturing Resilience Informational Sheet Series for Families and Practitioners.

ROOTS OF RESILIENCE TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PROGRAM

The process by which we cocreated a train-the-trainer program (see Figure 2) illustrates reciprocal learning that is central to the Tri-Learner model (see also Table 1). As we implemented Roots of Resilience workshops with 32 participants in Malheur County, we built capacity of Extension and local community members to offer future workshops while also strengthening academic faculty expertise in community partnerships. We began with a participation phase, followed by training and mentoring, and then by co-facilitating and cocreating over a 2-year period. Cocreation included innovation to ensure relevance to professionals beyond early childhood, such as Extension faculty and social service professionals. Without the Tri-Learner model, Roots of Resilience would not have achieved this degree of innovation.

INITIAL EVALUATION POINTS TO SUCCESS

Of the 24 participants who provided feedback on Roots of Resilience Workshop Part 1 (Resilience), 96% agreed that it improved their ability to "examine resilience and how it develops," "strengthen strategies to nurture resilience," and "plan and practice nurturing my own resilience to foster it in others." All 14 participants who pro-

vided feedback on Part 2 (Trauma Lens) agreed that they gained skills to better "understand how trauma affects children's behavior and development" and "use a trauma lens to identify and respond to children's needs." By cocreating the train-the-trainer materials, Malheur County is the first community to have access to a full training of trainers, which presents enormous opportunity for expanded capacity and access throughout the community.

NURTURING RESILIENCE INFO SHEET SERIES FOR FAMILIES AND PRACTITIONERS

Although the Roots of Resilience workshops were well received by the community and helped build common language on resilience and trauma, the local coalition also needed more. They specifically asked for something tangible for their ongoing work with families across various settings, such as food pantries, family nights at Head Start programs, child welfare, parenting education, and CASA. Thus, the Tri-Learner team collaborated with the coalition to create a three-part informational series called Nurturing Resilience: (a) Protective Factors Nurture Resilience, (b) Interactions Are the Heart of Resilience, and (c) Mindful Practices for Resilience. Each is one-page, double-sided, and provided in English and Spanish.

The content was developed from the research in Roots of Resilience. Cocreating the series by following the Tri-Learner model ensured integrity to the research and community-accessible language and visuals, with a focus on key messages of relevance for local and statewide early childhood communities. A local partner was hired to consult regarding cultural responsiveness and translate the series into Spanish. Drafts of the Nurturing Resilience series were reviewed by local coalition members and Extension colleagues prior to formal peer-review and publication in the Pacific Northwest Extension Catalogue (Brody et al., 2021).

Coalition members and Tri-Learner partners teamed up to distribute the series through hard copy, email, social media, and the Oregon State University Extension website. Strong distribution offers initial evidence of relevance to a compelling community need: 5,280 hard-copy sheets taken up by local, state, and national partners and 968 website views, with average engagement over 2 minutes.

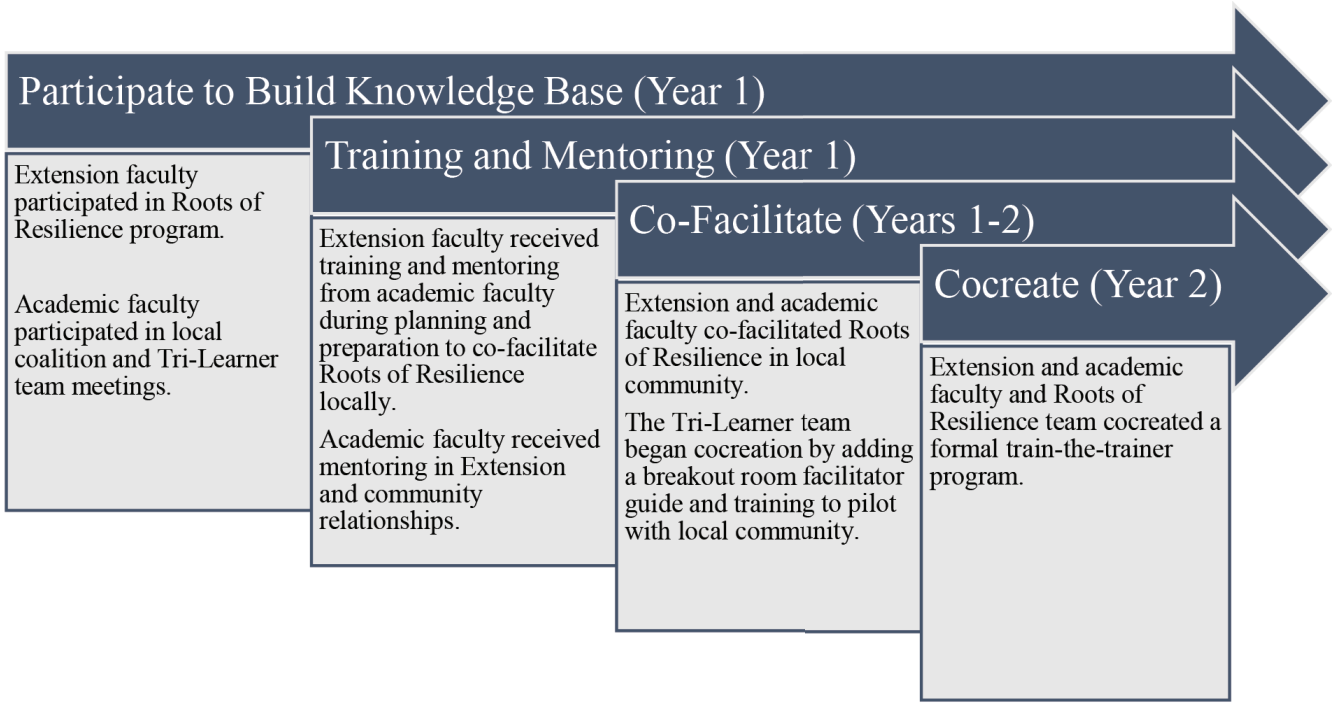

Figure 2. Steps to cocreate train-the-trainer model for Roots of Resilience.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION

The Tri-Learner model of Extension collaboration offers a structure for building partnerships to better meet communities' needs by cocreating innovations in research and application. This model integrates expertise from local communities, academic research faculty, and statewide Extension simultaneously rather than waiting until the dissemination phase for research faculty to share with community. Our team identified several keys to success to help guide application to other communities and topic areas (see Table 1). We have learned the powerful impact of starting with community needs as the driver of research and application. We further experienced that as our trusting relationships deepened through cocreation, we more effectively learned from one another's skill sets.

We found that it is essential for Tri-Learner team members to commit to being learners and mentors to each other. By fully sharing our expertise, we improved our short-term collective impact and established a strong foundation for ongoing collaboration toward long-term impact. Power structures can impede progress, with some team members' degrees or experiences elevated above others (Radhakrishna et al., 2014). The Tri-Learner model hinges upon reciprocal mentoring and explicitly acknowledges the equal importance of each perspective. Extension faculty based in communities have in-depth knowledge of community priorities, strengths, and needs as well as well-established relationships and applied skill sets in communication and engagement. Inclusion of statewide Extension expertise brings a lens and network of relationships to incorporate additional perspectives and improve the relevance of research and application for various communities across the state. Academic faculty bring content and methodological expertise and/or evidence-based programs that are crucial to addressing community needs. In this specific project, the various faculty members were located across three different parts of the state, which, coupled with time constraints and competing priorities, made it difficult to engage in organic conversations. These challenges added a layer of complexity to implementation and required meticulous attention to ongoing communication and detailed project management for successful execution.

Finally, we note that universities can play a role in promoting these types of reciprocal approaches through collaborative structures and funding mechanisms. For example, this project was supported through the Hallie Ford Center for Health Children and Families within Oregon State University, which encourages collaboration among faculty of various roles and disciplines. Additionally, funding for a pilot project allowed this partnership to take off and to garner matching funds from the local community.

Upon reflection, we note that for replication of this approach, faculty members in each role must be ready and committed to engage outside traditional boundaries. Future efforts should explore strategies through which universities can support this type of readiness, such as through faculty development and a broadening of position descriptions and/or promotion and tenure evaluation criteria.

CONCLUSION

This Tri-Learner model can serve as a tool for others to address local needs and advance research with shared learning, reciprocity, and cocreation that strengthen community impact. This paper builds upon a growing body of literature demonstrating the value of reciprocal academic-Extension collaborations (Bertsch et al., 2020; Burkhart-Kriesel, 2019; Franz et al., 2010), provides a tangible example, and identifies key factors for success. Initial evaluation evidence shows that community needs were addressed, with a high degree of uptake of the products created and participants reporting positive impacts on their knowledge and skills to address trauma and nurture resilience. The responsive manner in which the Tri-Learner team listened and responded to the needs of a specific community was key to its effectiveness, as was the trust and reciprocity established within the Tri-Learner team. Future work within and beyond Extension should explore this model in other communities and with any topic of strategic community importance and examine effectiveness. The field of Extension would further benefit from research on strategies for universities and others to encourage and incentivize such reciprocal partnerships between Extension and academic faculty and on the longer-term impacts of such approaches for meeting community needs and advancing science.

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