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## **An Ecological Model of Inter-institutional Sustainability of an After-school Program: The La Red Mágica Community-University Partnership in Delaware**

**Eugene Matusov**

School of Education, University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware, USA

**Mark P. Smith**

Department of Education, Chestnut Hill College  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the paper is to introduce a recursive model of ecological discursive sustainability, as it applies to and emerges from the history of an after-school program partnership between the School of Education at the University of Delaware, USA and the Latin American Community Center in Wilmington, Delaware, USA. This model is characterized by the development of shared ownership and collaboration between the institutional partners, the co-evolution and cross-fertilization of the partners' practices and the negotiation of institutional boundaries and structures. This model was developed by analyzing dialogic discourses across six diverse ecological domains of the partnership.*

### **Introduction**

“How can you work with this site for so long?! It is so pedagogically reactionary!” one of our university colleagues exclaimed to us on the way back to the university from the community center. This colleague’s question intrigued us. It has become evident that the success of our after-school partnership project between a community center and our

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university's School of Education does not necessarily require, like many scholars argue (e.g., Hargreaves & Fink, 2003), a common vision between partners or even compatible visions. At the same time, we are always on guard for the conditions which would require us (as university teachers of pre-service teachers and researchers) to leave the community center or abandon the entire after-school project. What makes us continue the project and what does it mean "to continue the project"? This puzzling question made us "stop" and study the practice of our rather prolonged (and for us rather satisfying) institutional partnership.

In this paper, we explore an ecological model of inter-institutional sustainability of the "La Red Mágica" (Spanish for "the Magic Web") after-school partnership between the Latin American Community Center (LACC) in Wilmington, Delaware, USA and the University of Delaware School of Education (UD SOE). We address the issue of how an after-school environment characterized by "free-choice" and voluntary participation of children continues to thrive despite the climate of grant funding at the community center which pushes structured programming, connection of activities to "school learning standards" and increasing demands to "improve participating children's standardized test scores" (Halpern, 2002, p. 204). We also address how our program has been sustained despite competing demands on the University side of the partnership. We compare our model and practice of inter-institutional sustainability to the University of California funded Fifth Dimension after-school community partnerships (Cole, 1996; 2000, p. 3), which was initially developed by Peg Griffin and Michael Cole in the 1980's at the University of California-San Diego, growing to a network of sites across the state (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). As of 2005, there were more than 40 applications of the Fifth Dimension model associated with 25 universities in the Americas, and Europe (Cole & Engeström, 2007; Nocon, 2005, see also <http://www.5d.org>). Fifth Dimension partnerships have long struggled with the challenges of sustainability. We also address how a partnership between the University and community can be sustained despite the ease with which partnerships collapse in the face of institutional hierarchy, financial pressures, and claims of territoriality.

Borrowing from prior work on Fifth Dimension after-school partnerships, we define the challenge of ecological sustainability as how to achieve *project endurance* that is based on a high "degree of affinity" (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993, p. 284) among both central and peripheral participants of the partnership, even as these partners are faced with multiple demands and have diverse goals and values conflicting with the project ecology. This definition differs from previous work in organizational and leadership studies which emphasizes the problem of sustainability as the problem of institutionalization of an educational innovation (Cuban, 2002; O'Neil & Cuban, 2000). We instead employ an ecological notion of "project" (cf. Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Sartre, 1963) which goes beyond institutions and leadership because the project can flexibly and opportunistically penetrate and leave institutions at will according to needs and circumstances. For example, our project has recently expanded to another Wilmington-based community center, serving mostly African-American children. As of fall 2007, University of Delaware (UD) students have attended a practicum at the new center for 2 semesters. Over time, it seems that the project ecology has interpenetrated from one community site to another. The two community sites have different ecologies and yet there is a spirit of the project that is developing across the sites. The project has also penetrated into other institutional contexts. For example, a former UD undergraduate student that participated in the La Red

Mágica project (hereafter referred to as LRM) went to a rural area of the Republic of Chad after graduation as a part of the U.S. Peace Corps. Guided by the LRM principles of building “free-choice learning” communities (cf. Falk & Dierking, 2002; Falk, Donovan, & Woods, 2001), our former student involved local children in assembling and maintaining wind generators that provide a reliable and independent source of electricity for the local community. In another case, a former student who became an elementary schoolteacher quit her teaching job after 2 years because she found herself, in her own words, in a non-supportive school environment in which she felt that she was betraying everything she learned in the LRM project. In our view, both of these cases illustrate the project’s sustainability outside of its initial institutional boundaries.

The power of the “project” is not in sustaining unchangeable and decontextualized Platonic ideas within the same institutions but rather in the creation of conditions for promoting desirable social relations (cf. Sartre, 1963). The notion of endurance of a project refers to its stakeholders withstanding the pains of the project’s survival in an environment often hostile to the goals of the project. Project endurance thus contrasts with ideas of sustainability that emphasize innovative educational practices “sticking” around as a result of maintaining relevant constituencies around them or reflecting “some deep-rooted social concern” (cf. Sartre, 1963). It contrasts with ideas of sustainability which emphasize endurance of a change initiative which adapts to and prospers within an “increasingly complex environment” without negatively impacting existing practices (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 694). Project endurance also does not imply a shared motive or mission among stakeholders (cf. Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Matusov, 1999; Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993; Nocon, 2004).

The purpose of the paper is to introduce a recursive model of ecological sustainability as it applies to and emerges from the history of the LRM partnership – guided by a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as well as a pre-existing approach to ecological sustainability (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). We treat the inter-institutional sustainability of the LRM project as a recursive ecological *process* (in a contrast to a state) involving various “ecological domains” (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979) – areas of the project’s *preservation*, *development*, as well as of its *vulnerability* and possible *breakdown*. We define domain *functionally* as the necessary resources for the project to exist (cf. “division of labor”) and *dialogically* as important and partial voices promoting and negotiating the embodied interests, dilemmas, and values of diverse constituents (who also have lives outside of the project). We experienced several domains of the project, and we refer explicitly in this paper to the UD administration, UD undergraduate students, UD instructors and teaching assistants, LACC children, the LACC administration and staff, and external financial supporters. There are other domains that we did not investigate, for example LACC parents, LACC officers not directly involved in the project, and UD faculty not directly involved in the project. These people had opinions and contributions that were probably also important for the sustainability of the project, but were outside the scope of our investigation. In addition, we did not investigate the recent expansion of LRM into a new community center site, as the complexity of the discussion would warrant a separate research investigation.

In this paper, we highlight the multiple, and at times conflicting, *domains* of the UD-LACC partnership, the diverse *values* of the project for the participants, and the *commitment* the participants expressed to the project. The conflicting demands among participants within and across these domains may lead to points of possible dramatic

breakdown in the partnership (i.e., points where participants' demands conflict with the project ecology) but, almost at the same time, they may lead to: (1) *development of shared ownership and collaboration* and (2) *co-evolution and cross-fertilization*. New practices can recursively emerge as a result of the participants' contributions within the various domains of the project's ecology and the participants' (re)negotiation of boundaries (e.g., between UD and LACC, between the after-school program and children's peer culture, between UD students and LACC children).

Each of the partnership domains serves a certain complementary function and is connected with other domains through institutionally regulated relations. Division of labor often pushes diverse participants into a partnership; however, what they do with this contact and how they dialogue with one another is never fully defined by the division of labor or the activity system at large<sup>1</sup>. Each domain is also shaped by *discourses* inside and outside of it that create *dynamic boundaries*. These boundaries are negotiated through the participants' interests, dilemmas, and values. Thus, project functionality, like the plot of a novel, is a pretext for a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1999). For example, a LRM instructor may contact the Director of the UD School of Education because she or he might need extra money for a particular project at LACC but their conversation may lead (and actually led) them to discuss different visions for the LRM partnership in the upcoming three years, the purpose of education in general, and some of the core dilemmas that education faces especially in relations with low-income minority students in the US (these are examples of so-called "eternal damned questions of Big Dialogue" using Bakhtin's (1999) vivid terminology). Thus, sustainability involves a *dialogue* among and within the domains; these domains are surviving and renewing themselves after facing with emerging dramatic events.

## Background to the project

The La Red Mágica program involves UD pre-service teachers working and playing with children at 2 community center sites in an urban, low-income area of Wilmington, Delaware about 30 minutes away by bus from the UD campus. Within the after-school activity, UD students work with the LACC children in the computer room, gym, art room, homework room, dance room, library, board game room, and kitchen as well as in an open, busy recreation and reception area. The LACC, which serves predominantly Latino(a) children, is located on the outskirts of a working class Latino community (<http://www.laccweb.com>). The Center is a long building in the middle of a square block surrounded on four sides by row homes and mini-markets which cater to the Hispanic community. The children at the LACC are from working class families, predominately of Puerto Rican descent (70%); children of African American (15%), Mexican, Guatemalan and Dominican descent make up the rest of the population. There are usually 20-60 children in the Center at a time, varying in age from 6 to 18. The LACC children have varying degrees of English and Spanish language proficiency. Many children are related to each other through family ties which facilitated children's multi-age and mixed-gender participation in activities. There has not been much parental participation at LACC.

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<sup>1</sup> We think that this fact raises interesting questions about limitations of Activity Theory (Davydov & Radzikhovskii, 1985; Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamèaki-Gitai, 1999; Leontiev, 1981) and illustrates the importance of integrating Activity Theory with the dialogic approach to discourse developed by Bakhtin (1999; Morson & Emerson, 1990).

The UD students who attend the LACC are predominately white, middle-class, suburban females in their first or second year of college. As a part of UD elementary teacher education students' requirement to take a "multicultural course," the students can take either a practicum-based course, associated with our LRM project, or a text-based course without any practicum, the non-LRM course. The practicum-based multicultural course for pre-service elementary school teachers involves students going to LACC twice per week. In a given class, the number of students varies from 13-22 students with an average of about 17 students. UD students spend 1½ hours at the LACC, twice a week for 9-10 weeks of a 15-week semester. The students in the class are split into 2 groups, and UD students are present at LACC for four days a week during the 9-10 week practicum period. UD students attend class twice per week to discuss aspects of their practicum experience as it relates to issues of cultural diversity in teaching and learning. The UD-LACC partnership was initiated in 1997 by the first author, Eugene Matusov, who came to UD from the University of California system where he participated in the leadership of a version of a Fifth Dimension after-school site (Cole, 1996; Cole & Distribution Literacy Consortium, 2006). The LRM project has developed in dialogic critical response to the Fifth Dimension. The Fifth Dimension provided us with language and models to think about the kind of project goals and ecology to which we would like to subscribe.

The LRM partnership began when LACC was recommended as a community site to Eugene Matusov by an undergraduate in the UD education program who worked at LACC. They were introduced to each other by Michael Cole, the co-founder of the Fifth Dimension. Also, faculty from other departments at UD highly recommended the LACC and offered their assistance in making connections with LACC leadership. The first year of the partnership, 1997-1998, involved planning for the arrival of the first group of undergraduate students in fall 1998. In this phase of the partnership, UD and the LACC built a relationship through several meetings at LACC and UD where we discussed our educational philosophy, logistics and resources. At the same time, Eugene Matusov organized a small group of mostly junior faculty who were interested in the project. This group began planning the infrastructure and logistics for the new class on cultural diversity that would have a practicum at LACC in the upcoming academic year. They also started lobbying the UD administration to provide financial resources for the project (e.g., money for transportation, site coordinator, activity supplies, teaching assistant, etc.) They also wrote many grant proposals and the LACC also applied for money on their side (see Table 1). This mutuality of funding early on in the program contrasts significantly with the one-sided, University-led funding characteristic of Fifth Dimension sites in their first four years of operation. (Cole, 1996, p. 287; Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993).

There are also significant differences in the purpose of LRM and most Fifth Dimension sites. For UD, the purpose of the LRM program is to guide elementary teacher education students on how to build relations with minority elementary school-aged children who are culturally different from UD students (Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Matusov, Pleasants, & Smith, 2003; Matusov, St. Julien, & Hayes, 2005). For that reason, the LRM project developed an afterschool program at LACC based on a collaborative, free-choice, safe learning environment linking LACC children and elementary UD teacher education students. The LRM approach is influenced by collaborative learning environments (Rogoff, Turkianis, & Bartlett, 2001) which are designed to develop student-children's mutual interests, shared problems and joint activities. LRM also promoted voluntary participation for LACC children in the activities and freedom for them to not participate

and even to move away from UD students (Neill, 1960; Tolstoy, 1967). The notion of “free-choice learning environments” has been more recently used to refer to settings for learning outside of the formal and constrained contexts of schooling, such as museums, zoos and aquariums, where the public can freely navigate, move, choose, and explore a contextually rich array of exhibits (Falk & Dierking, 2002; Falk, et al., 2001; Gettfried, 1979). This approach to freedom was influential in developing our project, but involves more pre-planning and design (of an exhibit organizer, for example) than the approach devised in LRM. LRM prioritizes freedom for UD students to experiment with new activities and to follow the children’s interests, and freedom for LACC children to choose the activity, move in and out, develop new activities, and to define the goals in the activity. As Tolstoy (1967) explained, attendance of educational activities should never be mandatory since when students are allowed to vote with their feet and walk away from the teacher, it provides powerful feedback for the teacher and reduces the possibility for teacher’s pedagogical violence (and responsive violence by the students). Instead of focusing on how “to fix” the students by disciplining them, a learning environment based on the students’ choice of participation in learning activities focuses the teacher on fixing and experimenting with his or her own guidance, discourse, and the learning activities themselves to make them sensitive to students and the overall teaching responsible.

LRM was also designed as *a safe learning environment* (Hiebert, 1997), which allows UD students and LACC children not to be punished for or afraid of making mistakes, since errors and misunderstandings are great opportunities for learning and guidance. In a safe learning environment, participants are encouraged to test their ideas and take risks for innovations and experimentation.

The “free-choice learning environment” and “open structure” (Matusov, et al., 2005) distinguishes LRM from many other Fifth Dimension after-school sites that are based on pre-established structures involving “mazes” (a pre-established sequence of activities<sup>2</sup> that children are allowed to be involved in), “task cards” (adults setting goals for the children), and “wizards” (an unknown adult figure that solves problems for the children via e-mail or letter writing, and so forth) (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). Cole sees this approach as creating children’s voluntary participation (in contrast to even more rigid structures in traditional schools): “We sought to allow them to satisfy their own goals within the constraints provided by the Fifth Dimension as a whole and to treat participation as genuinely *voluntary*” (Cole, 1996, pp. 293-294). However, such imposed structures in Fifth Dimension sites often result in conflicts between University students and community children as University students try to force the children to conform to the adult-designed structured environment (Nocon, 2002). As Nocon writes: “Resistant behavior of the children at the Explorer’s [Fifth] Dimension sites was a frequent topic of discussion in the college students’ fieldnotes and at the weekly research group meetings” p. 12-13). Nocon<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention that children have certain freedom of choice of activities within the maze unlike in conventional schools where they have very little choice of activities. The notion of “free choice” learning environment has to be further critically examine – the task that is beyond the purpose of this article. What is important for our discussion is that the LACC children in our program have freedom to join and leave activities at their will at any point.

<sup>3</sup> Nocon (2002, 2005) rationalized that some of the students’ experience of resistance was “productive”, in that it might lead to a good educational product. We consider such a rationalization of coercion, if not oppression, somewhat questionable. A discussion of this

found similar patterns in several other Fifth Dimension sites. The more imposed the structure by adults, the more resistance Nocon found to that structure among children and University students. Our analysis of videotaped observations, field notes, and UD students' web postings for several classes reveal no such conflicts between UD students and LACC children. We attribute this to the promotion of a free-choice and safe learning environment within the LRM project.

## **Methodology**

We (both authors) have been extensively involved in the UD-LACC partnership over a decade in the roles of University instructors, community site liaisons, observers, helpers and researchers. Much of our data emerges from our extensive participant-observation over time at the site. Detailed case examples are presented as data which highlight the conflicting values of the partnership from the perspective of participants in the various domains. Other data includes field notes of our meetings with different participants, e-mail exchanges, audio-taped interviews and postings of UD students on a class web where they were required to post 2 discussion messages per week and submit weekly projects. During interviews with participants in the project, which were mostly conducted in March 2002, we asked the following questions: How do you define the ongoing success of the LRM program? How does LRM fit with what you are doing? What problems do you see with LRM? What have you learned from participating in LRM? Through these questions, we wanted to hear dialogic tensions and appreciations of diverse participants related to the project. We argue that these dialogic relations define the sustainability of our partnership, and wish to draw attention to the dialogic tensions that are revealed both within and between the domains of the partnership.

## **Project domains: Values, commitment and conflicting demands of diverse participants**

### **Administration of the UD College of Human Resources, Education and Public Policy (CHEP) and the UD School of Education (SOE)**

As a University-initiated project, LRM could not have come about without support from the University administration that provides needed human, financial, material, logistical and structural resources. The support the LRM project has received suggests the priority of LRM to the administration with respect to other actual and possible University projects, since any institution operates in the context of limited resources. However, this prioritization by the University has not been achieved without a struggle that, at some point, required a last-minute intervention, on the request of LACC, by a Delaware State Senator to a UD administrator. The maintenance of this institutional prioritization has not been taken for granted and demands constant "discourse maintenance" to articulate why

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complex issue of a possibility for resistance being productive but still undesirable is outside of scope of this paper.

the project should remain a high (and expensive) UD priority and how the project fits within the UD institutional machinery<sup>4</sup>.

As evidence of the project's prioritization at the administration level, the College of Human Resources (CHEP)/School of Education (SOE) administration at UD sees the LRM program as highly valuable to the education provided to pre-service teachers. According to former CHEP Dean Timothy Barnikov, "The La Red Mágica project is the highest priority for the college" (Field note, January 2002). CHEP's commitment to the project per year includes a significant reduction of the class-size of the cultural diversity course attached to the LRM practicum, from 35-50 students to 13-22 students to accommodate both the discussion format of the seminar and transportation constraints. This reduction in class size requires more sections, more instructors and consequently more money into education of pre-service teachers and multicultural education specifically. Since students have to be bussed 30-minutes, four times per week for 9-10 weeks, this requires a significant amount of funding for transportation expenses.

These costs per year run up to \$7,500 (and go up every year). The practicum demands additional support for instructors to supervise and facilitate our students' work at LACC, and to provide a liaison between the University and the LACC. CHEP has funded over the course of the partnership a Graduate Public-Service Assistantship at a cost of \$11,000 per year. The students' work at the LACC itself also incurs expenses of approximately \$2,000 per year for activity supplies. For example, at the beginning and the end of each practicum semester, the University pays for a pizza party that the instructors have found was important for building community and relations between the UD students and LACC children (despite the fact that providing food in and of itself for the LACC is not part of the University's mission). Money for activity supplies provided by UD has also supported many student-child collaborative projects, including LEGO Mindstorms robotics kits, art supplies and educational computer games. Such commitment in funding for LRM by CHEP has been maintained despite conflicting demands on the administration for funding of other projects. There has been a reduction in the CHEP budget as a result of recession in the past couple of years, and there is a shortage of faculty to teach classes. The administration also provides essential logistical support and has been very helpful in scheduling other classes for the students to make the practicum possible.

The biggest concern of the administration is how to make LRM learning experiences universal for all students of education and how to secure resources for these experiences (including instructors who are willing to invest a lot time and efforts in this type of education) without significantly disrupting other courses and logistical processes of undergraduate education. The SOE administration, in 2006, was pushing us to make LRM learning experiences available for all elementary teacher education students at UD. This task required us to expand our program into an additional community center to accommodate more UD students. Although we were excited with the expansion of the program, we have kept a close eye on the SOE drive for uniformity and standardization that can potentially undermine our project, and for further cuts in the budget that would result in not being able to provide sufficient resources for the project. For example, citing

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<sup>4</sup> For example, for the purposes of expense reimbursement, the LRM expenses for pizza (discussed later in this section), have to be redefined from a "food" expense item to a "community building learning activity" expense item.



concerns with how busy the students are, the SOE administration asked us if we can reduce the UD students' required attendance at the community site from twice a week to once a week. Although we agree with the administration that education undergraduate students are very busy, we observed in our past experience with LRM that many of our students require sufficient time at the community center to move within characteristic phases in their experiences that the instructor needs to guide them through: from an initial 2-3-week "honeymoon", to several weeks of hyper-critique of the LACC children and LACC in general for their perceived deficits (see Matusov & Smith, 2007), to experimentation with new pedagogical practices and attitudes, and, finally, to development of deep emotional positive attraction and commitment to some of the LACC children (cf. Dorr-Bremme & McDougall, 1999). Below is Eugene Matusov's e-mail response to a SOE administrator regarding this issue:

*Dear XXX*

*You asked,*

*"I talked with V. after talking with you about EDUC 259 [the cultural diversity course attached to the practicum]. She supports the plan that if there are a small number of students that can only meet one night a week then the instructors will accommodate their schedules, but if there are many students (e.g., more than 10) that can only meet one night a week then there may be a section with once-night-a-week meetings. She will keep track of the number of students with conflicts during the pre-registration period and keep us updated. We had one question: will the students who meet one night a week (in either scenario) have the same number of meetings with children as the students who meet at night twice a week?"*

*Either I do not understand the question, or it has obvious answer – of course not. Those who cannot meet with kids twice a week will have twice less meetings with the [LACC] kids. Sometimes in the past, we had "floating" schedules for some students to accommodate them: they came on different days or in different frequencies to have twice a week meetings on average. This worked out well. However, when some (a very few) dedicated students would only come to LACC once a week they commented that they did not learn and develop relations with LACC kids as much as they would have wanted. For example, this is one of many similar web comments that such a student who could go only once a week had at the end of the class (Fall 2001):*

*"Another final problem (I just thought of it) is that the program most likely is over just a short period of time as a semester which does not give enough time to really get to know the students [i.e., LACC kids] very well, especially if during that time you (like me!) do not have the time to go two or three times a week. I feel strongly that I did not learn [at LACC] as much as the other [UD] students in our class. I feel bad about that. Ways of fixing the problems are to make the program a volunteer program over an extended period of time such as year instead of a semester."*

*She made many comments on the class web about how she did not learn what other students learned due to her lack of interaction with the kids at LACC once a week. In my teaching experience, this interaction is a truly developmental process that cannot be much shortened*

*[...]. Cutting students' community experiences in half [...] but it is leaving them in their struggles without letting them experience professional successes. If we have a few such students spread out evenly across the sections, we can deal with this less than ideal situation in the spring semester knowing that it is a one-time temporary situation. My first block [junior year school practicum] students never even think about cutting on their [school] practicum or classes, although almost all of their evenings are busy because they know that this is what is expected from them to become good teachers. I think we can transition in this expectation with freshman and sophomores. Also, we need to explore combining lab/tutoring/observation learning requirements from other classes,*

*Please ask more questions. What do you think?*

*Take care,*

*Eugene*

This issue has still not been resolved. Please notice the multivoicedness in the message in which the participants do not use the voices of others to make their points but also provide respectful distance for the agencies of others.

### **LACC administration and staff**

As a reflection of the value that LACC places on the LRM project, in fall 2005, LACC gave the "Award for distinguished service on university-community partnership" to UD. Former LACC Youth Services Director Gladys Coto expressed the value of the LRM program to her Youth Services Program at LACC as follows: "I think that we're meeting some of your needs, and you're meeting some of our needs. I think that we have the same mutual interest... I think the students from the University are [full of] enthusiasm or eagerness to learn [how to work with our children]... on our end, our children are willing to receive [guidance from UD students]. You know, educationally they're hungry, they [relate] well... it's a nice match. So they are ..., you know, being so close..." (Interview, March 2002).

The LACC took on many responsibilities running the LRM program which reflected their commitment to the project despite competing demands from many other LACC programs in Youth Services and in other departments. The LACC has paid the site coordinator associated with our program the highest salary at the LACC. They have spent \$10,000 per year upgrading computer technology and proactively devote efforts to secure grants for the LRM project. They also have spent approximately \$5,000 year for activity supplies.

The educational and organizational goals of LACC and UD are not exactly the same. LACC is concerned with orderly and predictably running their Youth Services programs, with a significant focus on activities that support school achievement, such as working with homework. UD, on the other hand, is concerned with providing their elementary education students with a safe learning environment that promotes activities of the children's choice to which UD students learn how to align. Such a gap in priorities appears to be part of a growing trend in the U.S., as federal and private funds are increasingly tied to adult-structured after-school programs focused on homework help, particularly for low-income and minority children (Halpern, 2002). In UD's view, the homework assignments LACC children are expected to do are often pedagogically insensitive and conflict with the model of learning through "legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For example, LACC tried to assist schools by unsuccessfully teaching typing to the LACC children for many years. The children resisted this instruction based on drill software "games". However,

when together with the site coordinator, Steve Villanueva, UD introduced the children to chat rooms with their peers in California, the children asked us to teach them typing so they could communicate with their California peers in real time more effectively. It was interesting that the same old typing drill software was used, but this time the students assumed their responsibility for their own learning. Currently, not only are LACC old-timers teaching typing to LACC newcomer children but they are also passing the sense of meaningfulness (“coolness”) and ownership for typing practice.

LACC Youth Services is committed to improving children’s school grades, but UD is focused on providing a space for UD students’ and LACC children’s meaningful participation in social activities, and eschews school tasks. Former Youth Services Director Gladys Coto summarized the difference by saying that she is “program structure-oriented, and the Magic Web [La Red Mágica] is the opposite” (Interview, March 2002). In our terminology, there has been a tension with LRM between a rigid, schedule-based structure and a flexible, open, and participants-defined structure. This type of contradiction is not uncommon for Fifth Dimension-like projects (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993; Nocon, 2002; Nocon, Nilsson, & Cole, 2004).

An example may help to highlight the significant differences between the educational goals of LACC and UD. An LACC teenager asked the LRM instructor (Eugene Matusov) to help him with his homework which involved writing a structured summary of a newspaper article about science; listing the source, the place, three details, and so on. The LRM instructor asked the LACC boy if he had already chosen the article. The boy nodded and showed a short article about melting ice in the Arctic. The instructor asked why he had chosen this particular article and the boy replied that it was the shortest article he could find on a science topic, and that he wanted to finish the homework assignment as soon as possible to go to play computer games. In order to promote LACC children’s meaningful participation in social and educational activities that eschew school tasks, the LRM instructor asked the child if he would mind spending more time and efforts on the homework if they turned it into something interesting and fun. The boy replied that he would be happy to do so if the homework were fun and added that he did not mind spending time and efforts on playing computer games that sometimes were very difficult and frustrating.

The LRM instructor asked the boy what he was currently interested in and the boy said that he was interested in downloading music from the Internet. The LRM instructor went to the *New York Times*’ website and searched for “music pirating” and found an article about a retired dyslexic schoolteacher who was sued by record companies for illegally downloading music. The article stated that the accused schoolteacher’s son proved that the record company used static Internet Protocol (IP) addresses to look for perpetrators while his retired mother had a dynamic IP address. In addition, the schoolteacher’s old computer could not handle current Peer-To-Peer (P2P) software required for music pirating. The LRM instructor read and discussed the article with the boy. The article was very long with very difficult vocabulary and grammar but the child was very interested in it and did not mind to work through this difficulty. The article generated an avalanche of issues for the boy: What dyslexia is, how a dyslexic could become a teacher, what an IP address is and the difference between static and dynamic IP addresses, why it is difficult to discover people who are accessing a web site if they use a dynamic IP address, why an old Apple II computer cannot handle P2P software, what copyright protection is, and, finally, whether or not it is fair to share and download copyrighted music from the Internet. The LRM

instructor demonstrated how to find the IP address on a computer connected to the Internet, discussed dyslexia and the purpose of education, and the old versus new computer operating systems. Another topic of discussion was that many LACC kids want to become successful musicians in future earning a lot of money and yet still want to be able to download music for free. Very soon, many LACC children in the computer room stopped playing computer games and joined their discussion, as well as some UD students present in the computer room. The children asked why the LRM instructor from UD spent so much time at LACC and who paid him for that. When they learned that it was UD that paid the instructor for his academic work, teaching, research, and scientific articles and that his publications were openly available in libraries, the children suggested that musicians should also have tenure and be paid by a university so their music could also be available in libraries for free. That was a very interesting and fresh idea even for the LRM instructor and later he discussed this issue in his University class. The teenage boy wrote two summaries of the article: one according to the teacher's rigid structure and the other based on the LRM discussion. Fortunately, the teacher appreciated his second summary. She awarded him with an A (the highest grade in the US schools) and invited him to read his article summary on the school's public-address system for the entire school. The LRM instructor created a learning community around the article about music pirating in which all the participants, including himself, were peripheral participants.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to "hijack" traditional, decontextualized school homework and turn it into something meaningful for the children. For example, on another occasion, an LACC child asked a UD student for help in copying vocabulary words 3 times and organizing them in alphabetical order. The child, who was a recent immigrant to the US, had difficulty with this assignment since he could not read and write in English. The homework was apparently insensitive to his educational needs which would require completely different curriculum and instruction. Because of the frequent insensitivity of homework assigned to LACC children, LRM instructors often discourage UD students to tutor LACC children with their homework despite many attempts by LACC staff to have them to do so. In addition, the LRM program has been designed to start at LACC after the majority of the LACC children finish their homework. Although the concern of the LACC staff about emotional and institutional well-being of LACC is very understandable, the LRM instructors are concerned that pre-service teachers will learn bad habits while tutoring LACC children with often insensitive homework. On the other hand, UD students are free to explore the homework room at the LACC and help the children with homework on the *children's request*, rather than on LACC staff's request (i.e., who is addressing whom here, cf. Bakhtin's notion of "addressivity", Bakhtin, 1986). The success and problems associated with tutoring and homework is often discussed in the UD class and on the class web forum.

In our view, the tension between UD and LACC regarding UD students assisting LACC children with their homework is rather complex. Despite the fact the LRM instructors do not require or encourage UD students to help LACC children with their homework, they are very sympathetic to LACC efforts to help children survive at school (even though the schools might be not always sensitive to the children's educational needs).

## **External financial support**

The values, commitments, and conflicts surrounding financial support could easily be a problem for sustainability of a project like LRM. For some lucky projects whose

innovations are recognized and supported by the external financial agencies, this is not a dilemma. When it is, this dilemma brings an issue of how far a compromise for funding can go in order to not distort the educational innovation. Often funders have their own pre-existing agenda that they try to push onto the grant recipients that are not necessarily compatible with the spirit of an innovative enterprise. For example, at the beginning of the LRM project when UD leaders turned to a large Delaware-based corporation for funding, one of the company's vice presidents made it clear that he was interested only in increasing test scores and grades of minority children. He argued that after-school programs must run only according to traditional school practices. UD's argument that such educational practices made many LACC children academically fail were rejected by the corporation's vice president. So UD leadership had to abandon the idea to apply for this potentially "toxic" funding despite the big need and the temptation to do so.

By comparison, Fifth Dimension programs have also struggled with the issue of funding. There is a desire on the part of the Fifth Dimension's University leaders in California and elsewhere to turn over financial control of the site to the community center, but this has been difficult to achieve, due to conflicting values and demands at the sites which conflict with the Fifth Dimension ecology. For example, the ecology of one Fifth Dimension site (a library) provided the most support for the Fifth Dimension's learning environment. However, the community site stopped the partnership when it was asked to take on more responsibility for funding and activity support because the project violated the library's ecology (due to noise and disruptions created by the games and other activities). Another site was the most enthusiastic for the project, and yet the site ecology was not as good for the project (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993).

We believe that one of the reasons why LRM has been successfully sustained for 10 years is because of the shared ownership of the partnership between the University and community members. This contrasts with the characteristics of most Fifth Dimension sites, which maintain University control due to the need to be accountable to grant funders, who demand certain outcome measures such as increased grades, improvement in test scores, or increased college admission rates (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). LRM, however, is not concerned with such measures, as its grant funding is not obtained through sources which require adherence to measures that can only be adequately measured as a result of students' participation in pre-planned unilaterally "organized play-worlds" like those found in Fifth Dimension sites. The shared ownership of the program (as opposed to territoriality) characteristic of the LACC-UD partnership has led to a recursive ecological discursive process of sustainability that has furthered the aims of the LRM program beyond what the University and the community could have done alone.

The financial and relational stability of the partnership is based on in- and inter-dependence of both institutions who are equal stakeholders in the projects. In this sense, we deviate from the Fifth Dimension sites. In its first year of actual operation, LRM was funded primarily through grants initiated by UD. However, in the second year, as Table 1 shows, financial support was primarily achieved through LACC-initiated funding. Since its second year, shared responsibility for funding has been characteristic of LRM.

**Table 1: Shared responsibility for funding: LRM's first two years**

<b>Years</b>	<b>University-initiated grants</b>	<b>LACC-initiated grants</b>
<b>1998-99</b> academic year	School of Education, University of Delaware; \$500 Honors' program, University of Delaware; \$300 CITE, University of Delaware; \$500 The Hewlett Packard Foundation; \$5,000 CHEP, University of Delaware; \$28,500	
<b>1999-2000</b> academic year	The Spencer Foundation; \$3,500 CHEP, University of Delaware; \$14,000 California Consortium of the 5th Dimension projects; \$1,500	CONECTIV Energy Corporation; \$1,000 Rotary Club of Delaware, \$3,000 The Bell Atlantic Foundation; \$5,000 The Ronald McDonald Foundation; \$5,000 The McCormick/Channel 17 Foundation; \$25,000

To maintain LRM's operation, UD provides funds for portions of the program for which it has primary responsibility, such as transportation and course/instructional support, as well as materials brought to LACC for UD-initiated and supported activities. LACC is completely responsible for providing funding for LRM site maintenance and materials, such as computers and art supplies. The mutual support characteristic of each other's projects is reflected in an e-mail comment from LACC's grant officer, Mary Jo diAngelo, to Eugene Matusov: "Hi Eugene, The Rotary Club [may] provide a grant of about \$1000 for card stock, printer ink cartridges, etc., for the Magic Web Greeting Card Project [that UD started at LACC]. Should we get it?" (February 2002). Conflicting demands between UD and LACC might result in problems with grant funding and hamper the partnership's collaboration. For example, in 2003, UD could not apply for a grant for the LRM project because LACC planned to apply to the same grant agency for another youth program. So LACC asked UD not to apply to avoid possibly damaging competition. UD agreed to prioritize LACC's other needs over the needs of the LRM project. Also LACC sometimes used their connections to UD for securing grants for their other projects. Thus, the LRM project has distributed financial support from both partners. This seems to avoid any possible hierarchy between the partners imposed by a unilateral financial base.

### **UD undergraduate students**

The value of the LRM program for UD students is well expressed by one sophomore undergraduate student who stated: "Being able to see the difference we made in their

[LACC children's] lives, more in retrospect than when we were actually there, made the experience so rewarding. One of the girls even bought Christmas presents for many of us. It was apparent on our last day at the LACC that the children were just as sad to see us go, if not more. They had grown very attached to us and looked forward to our visits. The worst part about going to the LACC is that, now that friendships have grown out of the experience, we have no way to get back there to visit the children" (Interview, March 2002).

This student also expressed the commitment characteristic of UD students to the program:

*"I used to complain about the amount of time going to the LACC took out of my night. But, once I was there, I always had a great time and the hour and a half flew by. In retrospect, I'm so glad we didn't shorten the amount of time we went or cut down on the number of days we went. Had we gone less, I really don't think the connections we made with the children would have been so strong... I still communicate with the [LACC] girls I was close to online and through email"* (Interview, March 2002).

There are many conflicting demands of undergraduate students which conflict with the project ecology. UD students frequently express concerns about time, the amount of work expected of them in the course and in their other courses, a fear of urban children, communities, and places, and the fact that the LRM course does not fit with other UD courses they have taken. There is also a contradiction between the LRM principle of free-choice participation in activities for LACC children and the mandatory nature of the teacher education program at UD where almost each class is required and the students have very little ownership for their own education recognized by the institution. A big cultural conflict between UD students and LACC children was described and analyzed by us (Matusov, et al., 2005). These tensions and contradictions become a part of the course curricula and class discussions and reflections for the students and instructors.

### **LACC children**

The high value LACC children have for the LRM program is a reflection of the friendships and relationships of mutual respect that are established between children, undergraduates, and the LRM instructors. At any time in their activities with undergraduate students in LRM, LACC children can walk away if they are bored or uninterested with what the undergraduate students are doing, which supports an "open structure" in the program (Matusov, et al., 2005). In turn, undergraduates learn that the guidance they provide must be sensitively focused on the needs of children in activities of the children's interest.

The value of the LRM program to the children is reflected in their comments to an informal interview about the undergraduate students who come to the LACC. Most of the children's comments described what they "missed" when the UD students "are not here": "When they [UD students] are not here, it gets boring 'cause nobody to play with anymore." "They entertain you here when they come!" "I miss them!" "They keep us busy." "I miss the energy!" "I love them!" "I miss their attitude, their clothes, their faces." "We had fun and played a lot!" "They helped us!" "We had a chance to color [in the art room] and talk about things that was on our mind, and we were free to speak about things that were on our mind." "They used to help us with our homework." (Interview, March

2002). Some children also maintain relationships with the students after the LRM semester is over via phone, e-mail and personal visits.

Most of the children who do not value the UD students' participation are peripherally engaged with the students. In Fall 2001, most children who did not get to know the UD students well engaged with them in the tutoring room (where UD students helped with homework) or in the gym (where students organized and assisted with basketball and other games). A group of 10-12 year-old boys and one 11-year old girl who knew the UD students from the gym felt that the "girls" from the University "talked too much" and were "boring." However, one of these boys noted that "when they *do* come it's like, it's more, more open activities than there are now" (Interview, March 2002). One of the biggest problems of the LRM project is conflicts between values of children and adult cultures. What is cool among children (e.g., participation chat rooms, video games, videotaping street activities, using foil language) can be seen as non-productive, counter-productive, and even dangerous by adults (Hayes & Matusov, 2005).

The children's commitment to the program is reflected in the fact that children's attendance at the LACC increases when the LRM program is running. Many children express demands, however, that conflict with LRM's 10-week long UD student commitment. During interviews with the LACC children in the recreation area and art room, the children commented that they did not understand why the UD students are no longer at the Center. For example, one boy, right after hearing questions about the undergraduate students, asked: "How come they don't come here no more?" Many children asked if we saw the UD students regularly, and asked us to tell the students to come back and visit them. A female UD student also reported on the class web that "some of the girls have told me that not as many children go to the LACC anymore because we're not there to spend time with them. I think that alone shows the incredible importance of our presence and how much the children value the program. The part I would guess they like the least is us leaving and knowing that we don't have definite ways to visit them after the end of the semester" (Class web postings, December 2001).

Another important value of the partnership for the LACC children has been the creation of fun, challenging activities in the after-school program which support students' strengths rather than deficits. Such activities, including a Lego-Logo Robotics club (Matusov, 2009, Chapter 10; Matusov, von Duyke, & Han, 2010, submitted), were organized by Steve Villanueva's approach to spread new exciting activities among children through organizing initially exclusive "clubs" (as we discuss below in more detail in the section "Co-evolution and cross-fertilization"). Through Steve's innovative pedagogical approaches, the LRM program has become year-long, reaching new children at the community center, extending itself to new types of activities and levels of participation, and to other members of the local community, including parents of LACC children (these developments are discussed later on). Through students' participation in these activities, we noticed a decrease in ethnic and racial tension between Puerto Rican and Mexican boys and girls, the creation of long-lasting friendships, and reduction in divisive teasing and peer-to-peer violence, which can be argued to be a spilling over of the principles of the partnership in the students' social relations. Similar changes also occurred in the teenage girls' social relations occurred through the creation of a "Girls' Club" by one of our former LRM undergraduate students, who worked at the center over the summer with funds secured from a UD Summer Service-Learning Program for undergraduates.



## **Sustainability of LRM as an ecological discursive process**

### **Development of shared ownership and collaboration**

In the face of multiple demands that may threaten the success of the partnership, an important aspect of LRM's sustainability is that there is a sense of shared ownership of the LRM program between UD and LACC. UD and LACC share objectives, mutually provide one another with space for experimentation, support each other's projects, and relieve each other's demands. Each of these aspects of shared ownership and collaboration are important aspects of the program's ecological sustainability.

The shared sense of objectives characteristic of the partnership is well expressed by the site coordinator, Steve Villanueva: "The Magic Web does *exactly* what *we* do here: spend time with the children, and help them develop certain talents or help them play, they keep them off the streets, help them learn other things that they would thought they'd never be capable of learning." LRM also fills a need for LACC in terms of relieving demands on staff, as Steve Villanueva stated: "the Magic Web University students come in here and ... it takes a lot of pressure off of us, we're really busy with a lot of children in here..." (Interview, March 2002). University students also sense that they are supporting LACC staff in their work, as one student said: "I think they like that we're there to keep an eye out for and hang out with the children. I think the children are more behaved when we're there, or at least, I would imagine so" (Class web posting, November 2001).

UD and LACC also provide and negotiate a space for each other to experiment in working with children. As Steve Villanueva stated: "It's up to the University students as to how to approach working with the children [...] They need to be comfortable with experimenting in building relations with our children..." The support for one another's projects is reflected in the shared ownership of grant funding, as seen in the comments from the LACC grant officer above. This shared ownership of the program's functioning is vital for the sustainability of the partnership, when there are threats to its stability, as discussed below.

### **Co-evolution of cross-fertilization**

The shared ownership of the LRM program, has also led to the development of a "*compatible* philosophical diversity of ecological, mutually supported approaches ('niches') in community practices" (Matusov, 1999, p. 182). Approaches to the practice of LRM cross-fertilize, and new practices evolve and emerge. As the former LACC Youth Director Gladys Coto stated: "UD comes in and bring ideas and put them in practice. That requires flexibility from both ends to change programs according to the needs of the University *and* the needs of the LACC" (Interview, March 2002).

Steve Villanueva, the site coordinator, stated he has learned a great deal from Eugene Matusov, the UD instructor. He speaks fondly about his experience as a peripheral member of the partnership, beginning in fall 2000: "When I first came here, the University of Delaware Magic Web was coming. Eugene came to talk to me and I saw his relationship with the children, how he approached all the children. It's real funny [i.e.,

playful], but really touching. And that helped me a *lot!* Eugene has showed me a lot of different ways of helping the children. I saw that I could also do what Eugene did – I liked it but I was not sure it’s OK to do at LACC...” (Interview, March 2002). Because this learning occurred in the practice of the program, it was not obvious to Eugene that Steve was learning from him because Eugene was learning a lot from Steve (e.g., through his “club” approach to activities, see below) and always introduced him to the UD students as “a pedagogical genius.” Rather, this learning is reflective of the co-evolution of the project through collaborative engagement in the partnership. Steve’s experience in working with the partnership gave him a space for experimentation, to begin to develop his own practices.

It is important to note that Steve Villanueva’s innovative ideas and practices were validated through his participation in the partnership, letting him feel that new practices were “OK to do at LACC.” His innovations of LRM practice were vital to the sustaining of the partnership under the LACC regime of Gladys Coto, which became increasingly focused on grades, tutoring and structured activities. When Coto was first hired as a Youth Services Director in Fall 1999, she fired all the previous staff hired under the former youth director and wished to eliminate the LRM program, arguing that the program did not fit with her structure orientation for the Center: “I *came*, and they [the University] explained the Magic Web, I couldn’t grasp *the concept*. I couldn’t, I couldn’t see how... ‘cause I was... I’m ... program structure-oriented, and the Magic Web is the opposite. And, I felt like, well... I can’t let them... you know, just because, one of the problems I had when I came here... was the lack of structure” (Interview, March 2002). Arriving approximately a year later, Steve Villanueva’s pedagogical innovations to structure children’s participation in the computer room has given new legitimacy to “free-choice” (Gettfried, 1979) computer activities at the LACC. Most importantly for the continued sustainability of the partnership, the “club approach” is an apparent synergy between the ideas of Steve Villanueva and the LRM program, developed through an atmosphere of mutual respect of each other’s ideas and values.

We term the type of participation Steve Villanueva promotes as a “club approach”, although he does not refer to this in this way. The participation he engenders from children is tacit and emergent. “Club” participation is voluntary, and there is not a “club” structure imposed on children’s ongoing self-initiated activities at the LACC. Rather, the “club” is an activity that Steve initially always *limits* to only several volunteering children (he usually uses invented excuses of why he cannot accommodate all volunteering children). The activity is something so interesting that a child will want to do it, and will feel “left out” if he or she cannot do it. This approach leads to the development of an activity that predictably creates a diversity of skills and opportunity for children to learn from each other. Children in turn teach each other the new activity, and the activity spreads at the LACC. Steve Villanueva, in turn, does not need to direct the activities he creates after they are initially put in motion, and the children are free to modify and develop new activities. As Steve Villanueva stated:

*“I don’t force the children to do anything. There are some children that... I encourage A LOT to do certain things ‘cause it’s going to benefit them. However, if some children are playing games in the computers, and they don’t want to do whatever projects we’re on up to, that’s fine. The children, who do not want to participate in our project, are going to see everything that’s going to come out of*

*this, and they're going to regret not [laughs] participating [laughs], they will felt left out ..., but even if they are going to play video games all the time, I don't take it away from them. However, in the other lab, the [homework] tutoring lab [it] is different...*" (Interview, March 2002).

Steve's projects and influence, developed through the partnership between LACC and UD, has allowed Gladys Coto to see a role for informal activities at the Center. In turn, the value she placed on Steve's work helped him to become the highest paid staff member at the LACC.

This synergy between Gladys Coto's ideas and LRM's approach becomes apparent when speaking in more detail of Gladys Coto's interests and values from the time since she arrived at LACC to the time of the interview conducted in spring 2002. Gladys Coto's interests were originally focused on increasing roles for tutoring and creating orderly scheduled activities, with schedules of activities for the day posted by doorways. The desire for scheduling activities in this way may have threatened one of the hallmarks of UD undergraduate work with LACC children that functions much more fluidly, with a focus around the emerging needs of children and providing sensitive guidance attuned to those needs. However, in the following quote from Gladys Coto on the importance of structuring children's activities, openings for cross-fertilization, complementarity, and synergetic practices are apparent.

"Everything should have a *purpose*. Everything should have, uh... whatever it is, if it is just to have fun, then it's fun. And then you plan the activity around having fun. But, I ... *learning*... was my biggest... *goal* because I like to *teach* the children... I knew the children were not interested in academics. I know our children are *flunking*. I know, *we know*, all these problems. I know the behavior wasn't this, desired. And I knew I had to *deal* with that. But yet I knew that if you *structure* things, the children, the children are *loved*, accepted and *respected*, you get that in return and if you structure, they will follow the... the rules and regulations. And then you also allow for the flexibility for them to be *children* in a community center" (Interview, March 2002).

The mutual work of the partnership allowed for a redefinition and negotiation of the practice of Gladys Coto's concept of "structure," which grew to encompass many of the seemingly most unstructured aspects of LRM, focused around "flexibility" and disapproving of "rules and regulations". Indeed, the space for negotiation was provided by the partnership's mutual interest in working with the children; in the mutually perceived need for the children for the children to be "*loved, accepted and respected*". In this mutual respect characteristic of the partnership, Gladys Coto points out that while "the [LACC] program is a very, it's a *structure*, it's [also] very *flexible*, for you guys [the University] to come in... and interchange things with the program. They... are willing to be able to fit during our structure, whenever, it's really very flexible to be able to do activities with the children" (Interview, March 2002). The synergy here does not impose demands on the partners for sameness of approaches but rather creates a space for the participants to learn to use each other's diverse strengths for mutual benefits. LRM definitely benefited from Gladys Coto's structural design at LACC. Also, she made LACC a safer place by pushing out drug dealing and loitering around LACC – a fact greatly appreciated by our mostly female students.

As an example of the synergy of Gladys' concern for structured activities and the needs of LRM, Steve Villanueva found a way to provide meaningful activities to a larger number of children than ever before by implementing a "sign-up" system for activities in the computer room. This system is one that children respected; because of limited resources, and the large number of children who wish to use them, children saw the need for time restrictions on their computer room participation, since it benefited all to follow them. This nicely fit with Gladys Coto's concern for structured activities, but also took into account the major problem that LRM would face if the time limitations were arbitrarily enforced and not based on children's interests.

An interesting consequence of the new synergy of perspectives and co-evolution of approaches to working with children at the LACC was a change in Gladys Coto's view of the University of Delaware, a place she shunned in the past for being insensitive to the needs of children in her community. "I'm going to tell you honestly, to *me* the University, was a *name*, a *tradition*. I even took a course at the University, a *traditional*... school... And, to *me*, *again*, what I said in the beginning, *now* I am more comfortable, I relate better with the University, I can tell the *children* to look into the University, because ... you're becoming more community oriented. You know, you can't *teach* these students to deal with community unless you are *here* in the community. Because it's going to be a total *disaster*... for the *children*... you know, they graduate [...] So *now* the University is becoming more community-oriented, and I think that's really good for us" (Interview, March 2002). This change of heart, emerging from Gladys Coto's participation in the partnership, is reflective of the mutual efforts of partnership participants to make sure that the LACC children and undergraduate students' work together makes sense, given dissimilar cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Another transformation in attitude occurred within the UD-SOE faculty in regard to Gladys Coto. When a UD professor unaffiliated with LRM visited LACC and listened to Gladys Coto's speaking about many LACC children are "little criminals," he commented that he could not understand how we managed to stay at LACC, given the apparently irreconcilable philosophical differences between Gladys and ourselves. Gladys Coto saw many LACC children as deficient, but fixable, while we (UD instructors) saw them as fully of current and potential strengths. Yet, both Gladys Coto and we were genuinely concerned about the well-being and education of the LACC children. Our successful work with Gladys Coto taught us that a common philosophical vision is not a precursor for collaboration, like many scholars argue (e.g., Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Partnerships do not require a common vision but rather a common problem (Fullan, 1993; Matusov, 1999). They also do not seem to require even consistency in community leadership (up to now, together with Gladys we have experienced and successfully worked together with 12 Youth Directors at LACC (due to high turnover for such a difficult, demanding, if not exploitative and highly underpaid, position).

The approach of cross-fertilization of ideas and practices in LRM differs from an approach which could be termed an "exchange of favors" (Smith & Matusov, 2011, in press), in which one party in the partnership (e.g., UD) would try to meet the needs of another party (e.g., LACC) in exchange for LACC's compliance with the demands of UD, or vice-versa. A "relational economy" thus develops, a term which Sidorkin (2002) uses to describe the process through which students in conventional schools grant legitimacy to teacher's demands; students engage in the teacher's sometimes meaningless (at least for them) curricular activities in exchange for something the students themselves want, such as a

spot on the football team, adult attention and support, and so on. Sidorkin argues that when an “exchange of favors” relationship is blocked, students may be unwilling to meet the unilateral demands of the teacher/school. Arguably, however, such an approach can lead to the acceptance of demands which could be painful or frustrating for one or the other party to meet. By contrast, the LRM partnership has created a practice of cross-fertilization of ideas and practices in which new practices emerge which meet the mutual needs of both participants outside of a need for unilateral exchanges of demands which could cause significant stress on the partners.

### **The LRM project spreads at LACC and within the local community**

As previously stated, Steve Villanueva’s projects and activities have allowed for the mutual goals of the LRM partnership to carry on at LACC throughout the year, without University students being present. His practices have allowed LRM-inspired activities to reach new children at the Center, in new types of activities. Steve Villanueva has also begun working with other members of the local community, including parents of LACC children. For instance, he has begun teaching women in the community to use computers. He could teach basic computer skills, such as how to use a mouse, which has been the pursuit of many failed endeavors in the past with LACC adults. Steve Villanueva’s approach though is different. As he states:

*“I teach the women computers... so they’re trying to learn more and they have a good time with me. I make them do emotional projects: create a certificate for your son, reward for this or whatever for being a good friend, a certificate for your husband... it’s a smart message, you know, in the context of a machismo culture... [laughs]. They love it. It’s touching...”*  
(Interview, March 2002).

Steve Villanueva’s approach is a social activist one, challenging *machismo* culture in a sensitive and tacit manner, and responsive to the needs of mothers and women in the community, some of whom do not work because their husbands do not want them to (not to mention other social issues) (cf. the writing project for women inspired by Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, Fiore & Elsasser, 1982). This type of practice, maintained throughout the year, is vital to the ecological sustainability of the LRM project.

Steve Villanueva’s work has also made inroads into the children’s homes. He has started a highly successful computer-building program. Used computers and computer parts are donated by area businesses, the University of Delaware, and other sources. LACC children are involved, with the help of Steve Villanueva and his child assistants called “techies,” in building the computers; for instance, children are regularly seen adding new memory and hard drives, installing software, formatting hard drives and updating BIOS settings. When the child finishes building the computer, she or he takes it home. Modems and Ethernet cards are installed on the machines for Internet access. Children, through their experience in working with Steve Villanueva and the LRM program, are teaching their parents how use computers that they assembled. Steve Villanueva said that many children’s parents have asked their children to show them how to access a popular U.S. Spanish-language television network’s web site: “A lot of our children teach their parents how to use computers, how to go to univision.com.... A little 12 year old kid taught them how to get to univision.com and showed her how to browse Univisión’s website to find her favorite soap opera stars” (Interview, March 2002). This type of extension into the home life of LACC children has expanded the influence and importance of the LRM partnership in the

future. This is particularly important for the LACC, as they have made many attempts in the past to reach the parents. When Steve Villanueva told Maria Matos, the LACC Director, about what the children taught the parents about web surfing on univision.com, Steve Villanueva said she exclaimed: “Oh my god, for real! WE’RE GETTING TO THE PARENTS!” (Interview, March 2002).

### **Negotiation of boundaries and structure**

An important aspect of LRM’s sustainability is how material resources are shared, boundaries are negotiated and problems are addressed. Latour (1996) introduced an important notion of “interobjectivity”, according to which shared material (and probably symbolic) objects forced the participants to coordinate, negotiate, and mediate their social relations. Material goods purchased by UD on a grant for use at the LACC are treated as shared, but not necessarily in-common<sup>5</sup>, property. For instance, when the LRM program first started, UD donated and purchased computers on a grant. Unlike in the case of the Fifth Dimension sites in California (Cole, 2000), these computers were never treated as “UD’s computers on LACC property.” When UD started a greeting card project in the fall of 2001 (the greeting cards were to be sold by suburban schoolchildren around UD to raise money for the LACC), UD provided paper and ink for the LACC’s color printers. There was no problem with material resources being considered “communally ours,” unless aspects of LACC or the University’s activities were negatively impacted, which in turn demanded a negation of boundaries.

The greeting card project is a good example of the negative impacts of an activity, initiated by UD, which was not adequately supported by UD students. In turn, almost all the responsibility for the project was placed on LACC’s site coordinator. Steve Villanueva was forced to spend much of his time during the course of the greeting card project dealing with issues such as showing children how use the software to make the cards, solving printing problems, as well as checking spelling and grammar issues. Many of LACC kids did not know what type of writing was appropriate for the greeting card genre (e.g., a child wrote on a card, “Hello, my name is Pedro. I am 7 years old...”). LACC children would have been best supported in their greeting card activities by UD students, who could have guided the children’s interests in and problems with writing and producing the cards. However, this did not happen because the UD instructors did not provide enough focus and guidance for the UD students to follow through with the children’s activities.

In this project, then, boundaries between the University and the LACC were *violated*. The University tried to establish its own “club project,” based on what UD leaders learned from Steve’s work. However, they failed to anticipate the lack of support for the project by the UD students, and failed to recognize the negative effects of this. The unsupported project should have been dropped. It was not like other “club projects” Steve implements, which allow for kids to easily learn from one another; rather, our project put significant added pressure on Steve.

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<sup>5</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, defines the word “common” as “belonging equally to or shared equally by two or more...” Like Latour, we want to emphasized non-sameness in the notion of “shared” (Matusov, 1996).

It was important, then, for open discussion to take place about this problem. When Steve Villanueva realized that the project was placing significant demands on him, he said to UD leaders, “Don’t do it to me again, please!” (Field note, December 2001). The consequences of the lack of the support for the greeting card project were thus openly discussed, and the need for mutual respect of each other’s needs reemphasized. It is very important that the participants address each other’s agency rather than treat each other instrumentally.

In LRM, territoriality within the partnerships’ domains is de-emphasized. The children’s well-being is prioritized over territoriality of the institutional hierarchy. For instance, Gladys Coto backed off from her demands for “structure” and “lesson plans” as soon as she saw the value of the UD students’ engagement with LACC children.

## Summary of a model of ecological sustainability

The LRM project has been sustained so far due to a recursive process that has formed through a history of trust and mutual respect among the UD and LACC participants. This trust and respect has promoted a freedom of activism, in which initiatives on both sides are expected and welcomed. In turn, this has led to a continuous negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries. This recursive process is well described by the following diagram:

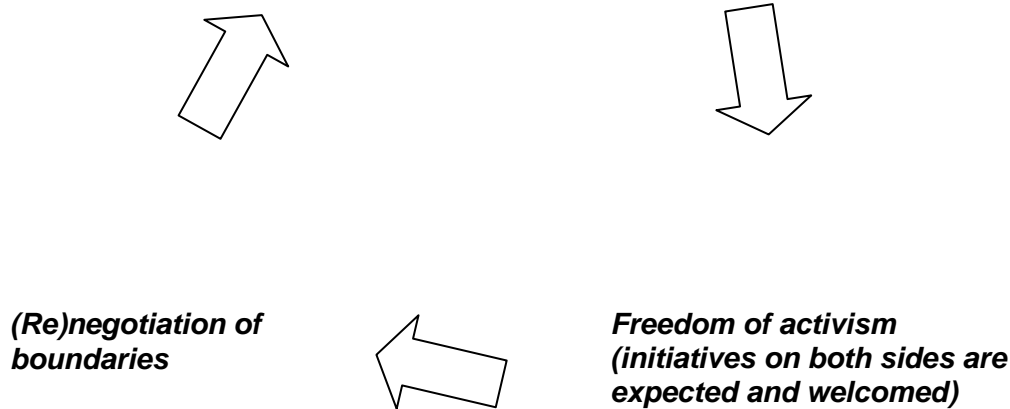


Figure 1: Recursive process of inter-institutional sustainability

From this diagram, it is apparent that a history of trust and mutual respect allows for a freedom of activism which leads to a negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries, sustaining and reaffirming the history of trust and mutual respect. This recursive process of inter-institutional discursive sustainability requires a mutuality of contributions and shared resources and values among members of the partnership. It also requires an expectation of and tolerance for synergetic innovations, on the part of any member of the partnership (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994). When the cycle is broken, the project would come to an end (or move on to somewhere else).

## Update

Since the paper was written in early 2008, the financial crisis during 2008-2010 and the Bush-era educational policy “No Child Left Behind,” focusing on accountability and intensive testing, disrupted and finally killed the UD-LACC partnership. In a search for dwindling funding, LACC forced to accept a new “toxic” grant with its primary goal on forced tutoring in homework that destroyed the LRM notions of open structure, voluntary participation, free-choice mixed-age activities, goal defining, and a safe learning environment for LACC children and UD students. Because of these emerging developments, and with great regret and reluctance, UD was forced to move to another, mostly African-American, afterschool urban programs where open structure still exists. Steve Villanueva’s “club activities” were severely curtailed and put aside to the periphery at LACC. Due to financial pressure, UD cut the practicum from 10 to 8 weeks and from 4 to only 3 days a week. There are no more farewell parties. There is also no longer a teaching assistant provided for LRM classes. Our college has changed its name and structure twice already due to a change in UD administration.

On a more positive side, UD started a new urban minor program and expanded dramatically the number of students who undergo the LRM program (two sections with 25-30 students). The classes remain popular as the UD students have a choice to take a class without the practicum. In addition, a totally new teacher education course associated with LRM was developed. Now LRM has stable and permanent funding. Based on an initiative of UD students, the practicum was recently extended to 5 days a week because of their willingness to drive there in their own cars. This provides children with more exposure to UD students and UD students with more flexibility. The UD partnerships with new urban Centers remain very positive and we try to stay in touch with LACC hoping that a future change in funding may revitalize our partnership there.

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### **About the authors**

**Eugene Matusov** is currently based at the School of Education, University of Delaware. His research centres on sociocultural and Bakhtinian dialogic approaches to learning as transformation of participation in a sociocultural practice.

*Contact:* School of Education, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716 USA. Email: [ematusov@udel.edu](mailto:ematusov@udel.edu)

**Mark P Smith** is currently based at the Department of Education, Chestnut Hill College. His research centres on Bakhtinian dialogic approaches to teacher authority, and on the potential of ontological event discourse in learning and in classroom management.

*Contact:* Department of Education, Chestnut Hill College, 9601 Germantown Avenue Philadelphia, PA, 19118 USA. Email: [smithm5@chc.edu](mailto:smithm5@chc.edu)