

Title: Action research outcomes at a community health education program

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Context and setting: The Faculty of Medicine at Universidad de La Sabana (FMUS) dedicates twenty weeks in the sixth year to collaborative development of Community-Oriented Action Research Projects. Approximately 800 students and 30 communities participated in the program between 1999 and 2007. An evaluation of the program was undertaken in an effort to systematize future collaborations.

Why the idea was necessary: Evaluating the Community Health Program provides a better understanding of the experience for both the community and University. It informs the future development and planning of resources necessary to improve the teaching-learning experience for medical students and communities.

What was done: A detailed inventory of final project reports was created from final project reports submitted by groups of students assigned to work at thirty different school communities where the healthy school initiative has been promoted. Seven categories of related variables were identified that describe the ways that student-community collaborations were carried out. Five recurrent combinations of these variables emerged as conceptual models of these collaborations. Focus groups and in depth interviews with students, community leaders and faculty further refined the models.

Evaluation of results and impact: Five systematized models constitute the major results of this collective work: Blurry Mirror; Local Health Needs; Community Interest; Participatory Action Research; and Systematization. These models provide a vehicle and a foundational framework for engaging in collaboration between community and health professions education institutions. Specifically, seven characteristics guide the development and implementation of a systematic model that embraces collective-health. These identified characteristics are: approach to the community; engagement and understanding the community; needs assessment; establishment of goals and objectives; development of a plan; intervention implementation; evaluation of results; and dissemination of results. This work has become foundational for the development of a systematic approach in our institution, and can be generalizable to other community-based educational efforts.

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