

Section I

Title of Project: Youth as Agents of Community Development

Country where the project took place: South Africa

Sponsoring College: Wellesley College

Student(s), Student's Home Country, Student's College, UWC attended (if applicable): Mona Elminyawi & Monica Setaruddin, USA, Wellesley College

Project blog or website address, if applicable:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/333326136818354/>

Summary of the project goals:

The program we developed, which we named the Young Practitioners Cooperative, is an educational course and capacity building program that empowers high school learners ages 15-18 to become development leaders in their community and globally. Our goal was to create an organizing, networking, learning, and skill sharing space to connect young people working in solidarity toward improving their local communities.

Contributions to our project:

While we did not raise any monetary funds, our project relied heavily on the volunteer efforts of university students and the willingness and time donations of various professionals and development practitioners who would come to our classroom and enrich our program and connect personally with our students.

Project Details:

Lessons with students in our program took place Monday-Thursday after school. Each week we focused on different themes in community development in the local context of Johannesburg. To supplement our own research and lessons, we brought in diverse practitioners to share their experiences in development and provide students a toolkit for engaging with their community. By the end of the program, 30 students were awarded either certificates of participation or certificates of completion (based on their attendance rates). However, during class days where we brought in development practitioners and employees of local government, we welcomed attendance from all students at the high school, even those who were not in the program. We only asked that they come on time and be respectful, and they were able to take away from the lessons of the guest speakers. On one of these days we had over 60 students attend and benefit from our program. Because of the success of our pilot program, we definitely see a long-term future for our project. We are currently researching and consulting on the process of registering as an international nonprofit. We would like to see our program adapted and operating in high schools, in collaboration with education departments and local governments all over the world.

Section II

Our definition of peace:

We believe peace exists in a space where people come together and agree to establish an atmosphere of respect for all people (regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, body shape, size, and ability). People in this space also commit to being allies; to working together towards mutual benefit, and supporting and advocating for the betterment of an oppressed individual, community, population. From there, people in the space can use their collective knowledge and experience in creative ways to achieve their goals for larger community peace and progress.

How our project contributes to peace:

By being deliberate about establishing this safe and productive space where youth could get together and work towards local and global development initiatives, the Young Practitioners Cooperative contributed to grassroots peacebuilding. While our program lasted 8-weeks, the project contributed to long-term peace because the cooperative that began at Jules High School is self-sustaining. The participants in our pilot program agreed to continue to gather together in pursuit of continued learning and socially conscious initiatives.

How this project has changed us and our worldview:

When we began our project we saw ourselves as "implementing," "directing," and "instructing" a program. By the end, we realized our job was mainly to *facilitate* - to work to bring the vision of our students to the forefront. The youth in our program already seemed to have the insight and problem solving abilities necessary to make a difference. Our goal became to give the young people in our program the information, tools, and contacts to facilitate their ideas, goals, and plans towards developing their local and global communities.

Personal statement:

"A cooperative education is one in which learning comes from collaboration, knowledge sharing, and skill sharing – and it can change individual lives and whole communities. It is a low-cost education model and it is one that we saw the success of during the 8-week program that we began with students at Jules High School. My participation in the Young Practitioners Cooperative was a full-circle pedagogical experience that I hope can be initiated in other places." - Mona Elminyawi

Photography:



Members of Young Practitioners Cooperative volunteer on Nelson Mandela Day at Usindiso Women's Shelter.



During our week on Education and Leadership, the Young Practitioners listen to a guest practitioner talk about her work with the African Sports and Scholastic Initiative for Students in Townships (Assist).



After 8 weeks of programming, the Young Practitioners graduate and receive certificates of participation or completion (according to their attendance rates). Each certificate is signed by: the directors of the program (Mona and Monica), the principal of Jules High School, an employee of the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa, and an employee of the City of Johannesburg. Students are encouraged to continue on with their membership in the Young Practitioners Cooperative beyond the last day of the program.