# Community-Based Collaborative Action Research Supports Academic-Community Partnerships in a Service-Learning Project

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## Purpose:
The purpose of this service-learning project was to assess the effectiveness of the Community-Based Collaborative Action Research (CBCAR) framework in providing real-world learning opportunities for enhancing baccalaureate nursing students' public health knowledge.

## Background:
Service-learning teaches the value of leadership skills, promotes students' personal growth, academic achievement, and opportunity for strengthening interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, and social responsibility. Academic-community partnerships provide opportunities for students to apply newly learned skills in real-world settings. These opportunities meet a community's need and facilitate greater understanding of the nursing profession and meaning of being a professional.
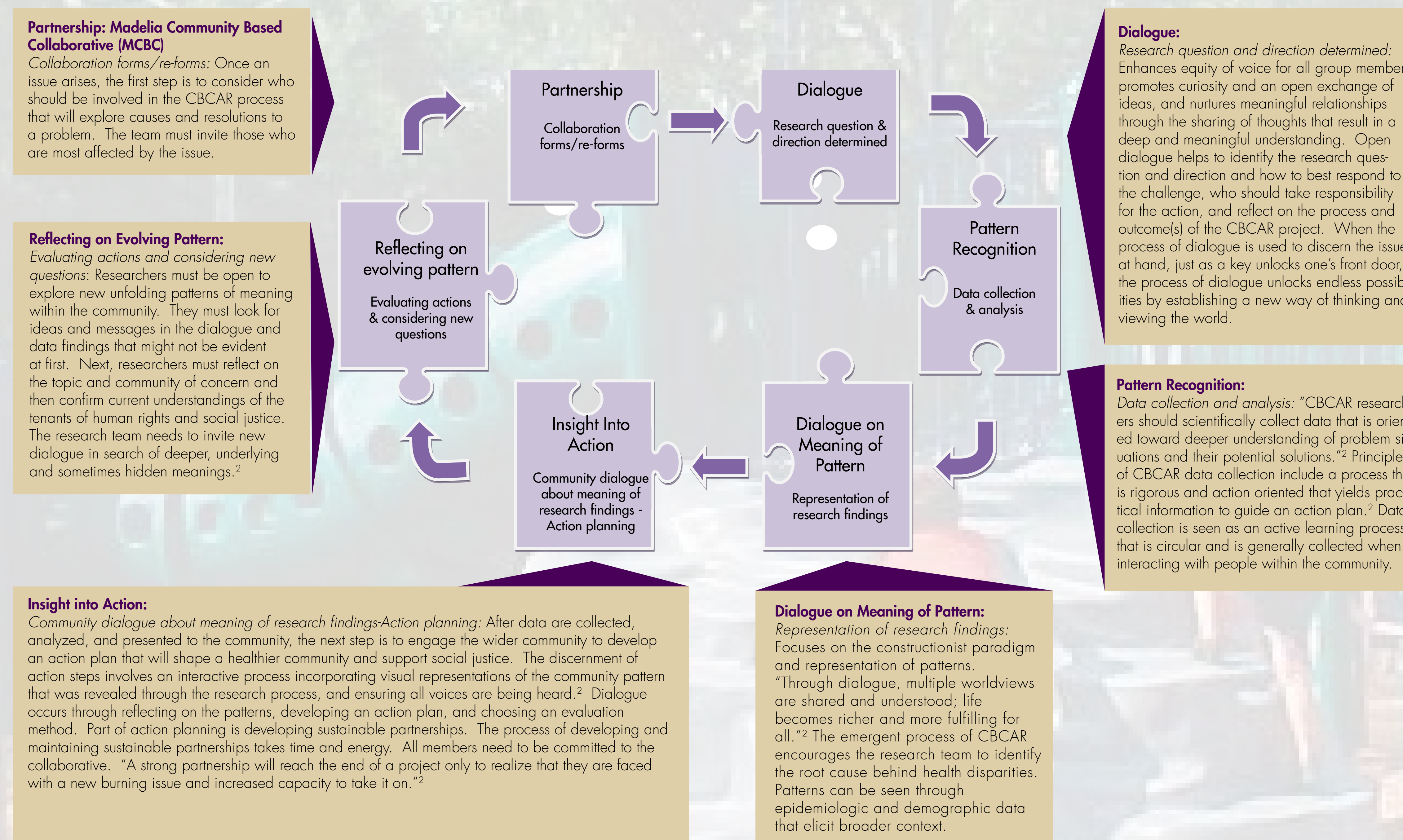
## Conceptual Framework:
This case study analysis used the six phase framework of the Community-Based Collaborative Action Research (CBCAR) to guide a community health needs assessment of a rural community within a service-learning project while students applied public health nursing core competencies.[2]

## Methods:
The Community-Based Collaborative Action Research framework linked service-learning and community health needs assessment with public health nursing core competencies. Fifteen nursing students partnered with collaborative members. Student observational field notes and narrative reflections were analyzed qualitatively for fidelity to the CBCAR framework and to evaluate student public health knowledge. Community data and student stories were extracted from this comprehensive real-world, service-learning experience of students to provide meaningful data.

## Community-Based Collaborative Action Research Framework

**Partnership: Madelia Community Based Collaborative (MCBC)**
*Collaboration forms/re-forms:* Once an issue arises, the first step is to consider who should be involved in the CBCAR process that will explore causes and resolutions to a problem. The team must invite those who are most affected by the issue.

**Reflecting on Evolving Pattern:**
*Evaluating actions and considering new questions:* Researchers must be open to explore new unfolding patterns of meaning within the community. They must look for ideas and messages in the dialogue and data findings that might not be evident at first. Next, researchers must reflect on the topic and community of concern and then confirm current understandings of the tenants of human rights and social justice. The research team needs to invite new dialogue in search of deeper, underlying and sometimes hidden meanings.[2]

**Insight into Action:**
*Community dialogue about meaning of research findings-Action planning:* After data are collected, analyzed, and presented to the community, the next step is to engage the wider community to develop an action plan that will shape a healthier community and support social justice. The discernment of action steps involves an interactive process incorporating visual representations of the community pattern that was revealed through the research process, and ensuring all voices are being heard.[2] Dialogue occurs through reflecting on the patterns, developing an action plan, and choosing an evaluation method. Part of action planning is developing sustainable partnerships. The process of developing and maintaining sustainable partnerships takes time and energy. All members need to be committed to the collaborative. "A strong partnership will reach the end of a project only to realize that they are faced with a new burning issue and increased capacity to take it on."[2]

**Partnership**
Collaboration forms/re-forms

**Dialogue**
Research question & direction determined

**Pattern Recognition**
Data collection & analysis

**Reflecting on evolving pattern**
Evaluating actions & considering new questions

**Insight Into Action**
Community dialogue about meaning of research findings - Action planning

**Dialogue on Meaning of Pattern**
Representation of research findings

**Dialogue:**
*Research question and direction determined:* Enhances equity of voice for all group members, promotes curiosity and an open exchange of ideas, and nurtures meaningful relationships through the sharing of thoughts that result in a deep and meaningful understanding. Open dialogue helps to identify the research question and direction and how to best respond to the challenge, who should take responsibility for the action, and reflect on the process and outcome(s) of the CBCAR project. When the process of dialogue is used to discern the issue at hand, just as a key unlocks one's front door, the process of dialogue unlocks endless possibilities by establishing a new way of thinking and viewing the world.

**Pattern Recognition:**
*Data collection and analysis:* "CBCAR researchers should scientifically collect data that is oriented toward deeper understanding of problem situations and their potential solutions."[2] Principles of CBCAR data collection include a process that is rigorous and action oriented that yields practical information to guide an action plan.[2] Data collection is seen as an active learning process that is circular and is generally collected when interacting with people within the community.

**Dialogue on Meaning of Pattern:**
*Representation of research findings:* Focuses on the constructionist paradigm and representation of patterns. "Through dialogue, multiple worldviews are shared and understood; life becomes richer and more fulfilling for all."[2] The emergent process of CBCAR encourages the research team to identify the root cause behind health disparities. Patterns can be seen through epidemiologic and demographic data that elicit broader context.

## Results:
Nursing students successfully utilized the CBCAR framework in collaboration with the critical access hospital and community members to design and conduct the community health needs assessment. By applying what they have learned from their education to a real community which lacks resources, students developed skills in six of the eight domains of the Quad Council's core competencies for public health nurses and identified four service-learning themes:

1. Real-world solutions
2. Professional development
3. Community collaboration
4. Making a difference

## Conclusions:
Community-Based Collaborative Action Research facilitates collaborative partnerships and relationships throughout the service-learning process. The CBCAR framework:

- provided a safe environment where open, non-judgmental dialogue encouraged and strengthened community voices which had not always been heard by health care professionals.
- created space where meaningful work by community members, nursing students and nurse researchers could collaborate to enhance the health and wellness of the rural community.
- provided gratifying learning experiences for nursing students and nurse researchers which benefited community growth through dialogue,
- promoted meaningful long-term relationships with those involved in the process.

When nurse educators provide service-learning opportunities, students learn to recognize barriers and social determinants of health within the community, prioritize primary prevention, and use available resources to help improve societal health. Use of the CBCAR framework is recommended to facilitate academic-community partnerships and relationships when designing and implementing service-learning opportunities.

## Acknowledgements:

## References:
[2] Adapted with permission from Pavlish, C. & Pharris, M. D. (2012). Community-based collaborative action research: A nursing approach. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

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