

**“ROOTS WITH WINGS:
Building Technology & Communication Skills and Fostering Resiliency with Youth
in Floyd County, Virginia”**

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**ATP Project Date
January 2015 – June 30, 2016**

**Date Submitted
June 6, 2015
Resubmitted July 31, 2015 with Revisions**

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PROJECT FOCUS: Radford University will participate in the ROOTS WITH WINGS: Floyd County, Virginia Place-based Education Oral History Project to impart skills to build and strengthen the capacity of Floyd County's youth -- as well as Radford University student mentors -- to compete in the global economy. This effort directly relates to the ARC's goal to link youth capacity building with future economic development and community leadership in the region.

PROJECT DETAILS

Course Number, Name, and Instructor: The 2015 Radford University Appalachian Teaching Project is embedded in a Spring 2015 semester cross-listed course: APST 495/595 Research in Appalachia and SOCY 493 Practicum in Sociology (3 credits), taught by Dr. Melinda Bollar Wagner, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Appalachian Studies. The results of the Project will be reported at the December 2015 ATP Conference by the students and ATP Project Director, Dr. Theresa Burriss.

Community Partners: Floyd Story Center at the Old Church Gallery, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization; Floyd County High School.

The Radford University ATP ROOTS WITH WINGS Project's Efforts to Strengthen the Capacity of Appalachian Youth to Compete in the Global Economy include:

- **Imparting state-of-the-art technological skills to enhance the capacity of youth to compete in a global economy.** During the 2015 Appalachian Studies Conference at East Tennessee State University's "Many Mountains Plenary: Opportunity and Enterprise in Appalachia," Earl Gohl, ARC Federal Co-Chair, described Appalachia as "the next great investment opportunity in America." To take advantage of this opportunity, the region needs what Dr. Randy Wykoff, Dean of ETSU's College of Public Health, speaking in the same plenary, described as a "healthy, educated, drug-free workforce." Dr. Wykoff provided data showing that a high school degree is worth five years of life and \$1.1 million in lifetime earnings. His talk described a three-part challenge to achieving the workforce goal: jobs and education, health care, and behavior change. The ATP Roots with Wings Project provides high school and university students with the opportunity to acquire and implement technology skills related to computer programs, as well as video and audio equipment, especially in a "real life" setting, thereby increasing their future employability.
- **Fostering** students' communication skills in different forms with a variety of audiences, including the public-at-large. Both the FCHS and RU students produce reflective writing and contribute to the transcription process, as well as participate in oral presentations in small and large groups. Related to this, the students engage in group work that facilitates collaboration, negotiation, and problem-solving, all skills necessary to succeed in most work environments.
- **Promoting interest in higher education through peer mentorship to enhance youths' capacity to compete in a global economy.** Some of Floyd County's youth have no experience with higher education. Through this ATP Project, relationships are forged among high school students, high school teacher, college students, college professor, Floyd Story Center community partner mentors, and elder resident interviewees. These relationships remove some of the unknowns of higher education and make it an attractive possibility for

the youth. In particular, the peer mentoring that occurs between the FCHS students and RU students has proven effective in dispelling myths, such as inability to afford college, offering real hope of post-secondary educational pursuits, and encouraging long-term goal planning and attainment.

The Radford University ATP ROOTS WITH WINGS Project's Efforts to Counteract Threats to Community Wellbeing include:

- **Developing resiliency to counteract threats to community wellbeing:** Research has shown that children who are most resilient in the face of challenges such as negative stereotyping, community and family dysfunction, or culture change have a “strong intergenerational self.” They know they belong to something larger than themselves. Youth taught to capture the wisdom of elders learn lessons of past hardships and absorb demonstrations of coping skills.
- **Fostering pride in local community and regional Appalachian cultures.** Floyd County's Land Policy Task Force noted that “What Matters Most” to Floyd County residents includes “preservation of rural character, Appalachian heritage, and community identity” (Land Policy Task Force 2013). The activities of the high school students and their Radford University ATP student mentors will contribute to this goal.
- **Conserving local history and connecting to global issues.** The community partners have identified a need to connect today's high school generation to narratives of strength, resiliency, and sustainability to be learned from World War II veterans and their families. The effects of global decisions and actions – including war -- internationally and “back home” in their own community become clear to the young interviewers.

Number and Description of Planned Meetings with the Community Partner:

- *Orientation meeting* with community partners: Co-directors of the Floyd Story Center and Floyd County High School Technology Instruction teacher meet with the Radford University ATP class to crystallize expectations.
- *Weekly meetings* occur among the class members and the community partners before each high school class period in which the mentors participate (once a week) to solidify expectations for the day.
- *Weekly meetings*, as needed, occur after each high school class period, during which mentors can provide evaluation of the just-past class period and direction for future class periods.
- *Debriefing meeting* with community partners at the University final exam time to make suggestions and recommendations for the future.

Overview of the Project, Including its Central Focus:

To accomplish the goals of the Appalachian Teaching Project, the Spring 2015 Appalachian Teaching Project class is embedded into a Floyd County High School class once a week. (The high school class meets 5 days a week for 90 minutes.)

The ROOTS WITH WINGS: Floyd County Place-based Education Oral History Project plants the *roots* of the “web of meaningful relationships” found to be a factor in community resilience. At the same time the Project affixes state-of-the-art technology *wings*. The RU ATP students become mentors working as part of an intergenerational team to teach high school students how to:

- conduct ethical, methodologically sound interviews;

- record using state-of-the-art audio and video equipment;
- transcribe verbatim;
- create searchable tables of content;
- research historical background;
- archive;
- discover stories and themes in interviews;
- use qualitative methodology and inductive reasoning to extract a theme from hour-long interviews;
- develop storyboards;
- write summaries of their movie ideas of various lengths for various audiences;
- create movies;
- write evaluative commentaries for the Project as a whole and for the written and oral teaching methods;
- write reflective journals, connecting the Project’s goals to their own lives and futures.

The overall goals of the Project are forging connections, building technology skills, conserving history and culture, fostering intergenerational understanding, and developing interest in higher education.

Resiliency: Community resilience affects individual resilience. Studies have shown that “children's resilience [is] enhanced by a strong sense of belonging to a vibrant community that ‘celebrates its own culture and history’ (McKay & Prokop 2007:47; Kirmayer et al 2009:84).

Theoretical underpinnings: The Floyd County Place-Based Education Intergenerational Oral History Project applies the social science findings regarding resiliency by providing a forum for “intergenerational communication in sharing coping skills” (Kirmayer et al 2009:81). Narratives serve to foster resiliency by linking “the generations, transmitting knowledge, values, and a sense of shared identity. The act of storytelling and listening itself is a way to connect people and create a sort of *communitas*—a lived sense of belonging and solidarity” (Kirmayer et al 2009:81). We will create a multi-generational community of scholars with the ATP Project.

The Project provides this set of Floyd County’s youth with roots—a strong appreciation for the wisdom of their county’s elders—and wings—technological skills to carry into the future.

Goals and Objectives: The goals and objectives listed here are met by means of the collaborative teaching, interviewing, and movie-making processes undertaken by the Radford University mentors, Floyd County High School students, Floyd Story Center community partners, and elder residents of Floyd County. During the Spring 2015 ATP class, students implemented the Workbook and its activities, as developed in the Fall 2014 ATP class, in the Floyd County HS classroom, with the high school students engaged in more helpful practice sessions before the actual interviews.

GOALS of the ROOTS WITH WINGS Project for Floyd County High School students:

Short-Term

- build technology skills through hands-on work with computer hardware and software, audio

equipment, and video equipment;

- build oral and written communication skills;
- provide opportunities for collaborative group work;
- increase problem-solving skills;
- develop intergenerational connections for individual resilience and community sustainability;
- conserve local history;
- connect to global issues (e.g. WW II and subsequent wars and their effects);
- foster pride in Appalachian cultures and local community;
- promote interest in higher education;

Long-Term

- encourage community commitment through leadership in government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and businesses;
- inspire entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby increasing economic development and diversification in the region;
- prepare future engaged regional and global citizens through mentorships; and

for **Radford University mentors:**

Short-Term

- improve leadership skills;
- increase ability to communicate with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds;
- increase ability to communicate with people of all ages;
- enhance technical skills in computer use, as well as audio and video equipment, by teaching others;
- test career possibilities focused on Appalachia's youth, such as teaching and community outreach;
- enhance student learning through real-world problem solving;
- foster a culture of engaged learning and scholarship;
- make connections between one's academic experiences/ knowledge and one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government;

Long-Term

- encourage community commitment through leadership in government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and businesses;
- inspire entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby increasing economic development and diversification in the region;
- prepare future engaged regional and global citizens through mentorships.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

- Poster outlining the semester's products
- Presentation at the Appalachian Teaching Project Conference in Washington, D.C.
- Presentation at the Appalachian Studies Conference
- Presentation at the Radford University Student Engagement Forum
- Participation in a Celebration at the end of the high school year, at the high school, bringing together high school students, university mentors, interviewees, interviewers, community partners, school employees, and members of the community.

TANGIBLE PRODUCTS:

- Four to eight video movies about four elderly residents of Floyd County, Virginia
- Four complete transcriptions of interviews with the four residents
- Four complete content logs/tables of contents for same
- Four sets of digitized files of photographs and other items the interviewee may bring with him/her to the interview
- All of the above put into presentation binders for the interviewee and family
- All of the above archived at the Floyd Story Center at the Old Church Gallery
- Numerous workshop learning exercises
- Numerous photographs documenting the learning and interviewing process
- High school and university student final papers including discussion of:
 - Suggestions regarding what to keep and what to change in the future
 - Suggestions regarding teaching materials and methods
 - Reflections regarding connections to high school and university coursework
 - Evaluations of the worth of the Project to its various constituencies, including themselves.

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