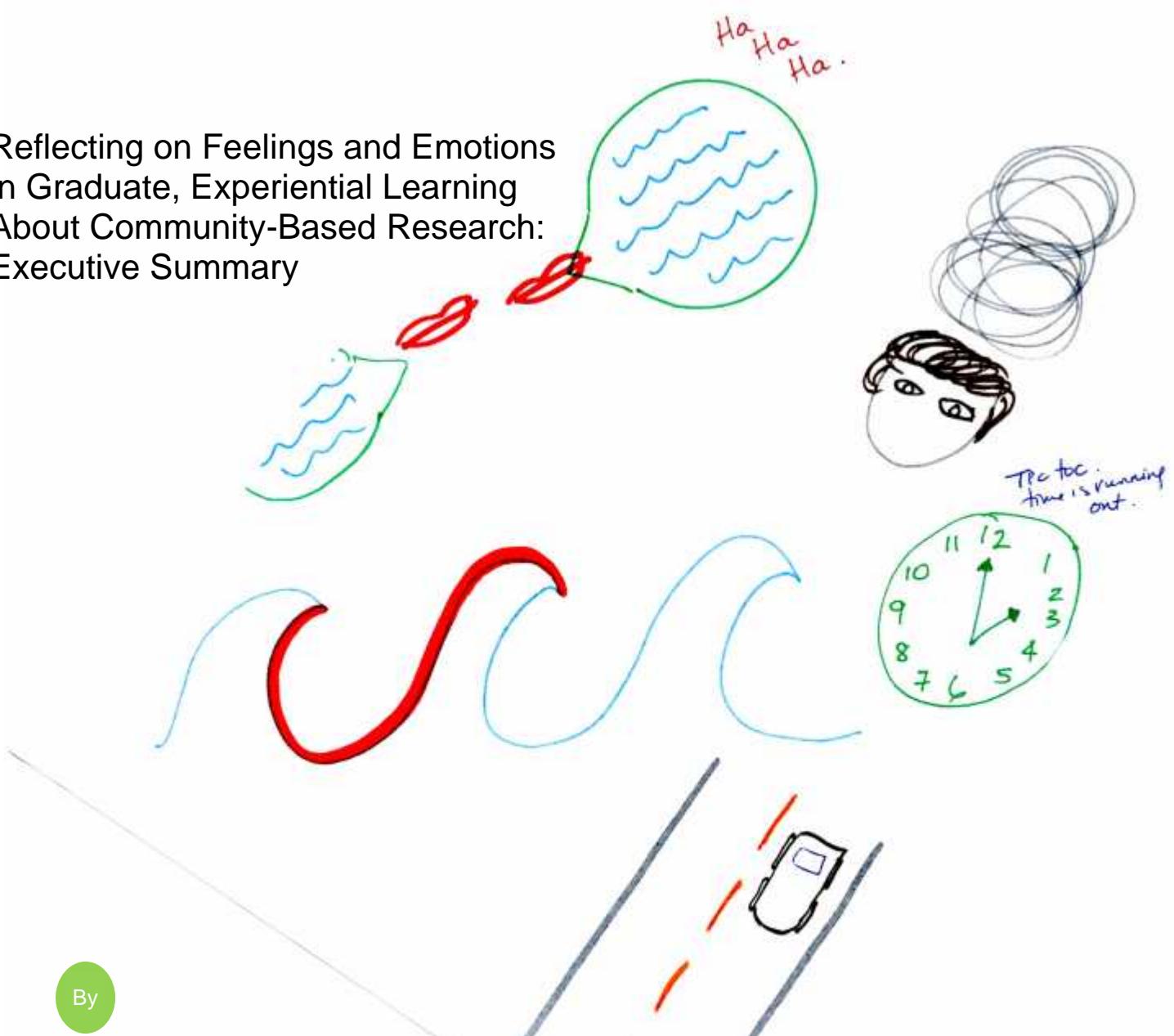


# Reflecting on Feelings and Emotions in Graduate, Experiential Learning About Community-Based Research: Executive Summary



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“The clock is...we leave really early in the morning sometimes on these road trips, but also that time is a factor and sometimes that could be 3 in the morning I am up thinking about this stuff. Or it could be tick-tock, time is running out- we need to spend our grant money, and we haven't accomplished what we were meant to, and we spent a year and a half building relationships, and/or the student is kind of like, *Oh my god, we are in July here- what the heck have I been doing, building relationships?* So kind of like, time is a factor and time I think has a lot of connotations- it could be the time you invest in students, but also time always seems to be running out, and you turn around, and it's gone kind of thing. But also relaxing around time and, *Oh wow, it is August, and we didn't accomplish what we set out to accomplish*, and that's okay, too.

And this is my attempt at two people talking- we do a lot of talking and we actually do a fair bit of laughing.... So that's kind of the essence of- and again it's that high and low; we do spend a lot of time together. We talk a lot because it is so process-oriented. ....

-Tanya, Mentors' focus group

Cover page – **Figure 1:** Essence of mentoring graduate-level experiential learning about community-based research (CBR) (Tanya, Mentor).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In community-based research (CBR), relationships are a medium of experience. Even though CBR practitioners are expected to relate well in the midst of partnership activities, navigating potentially intense feelings and emotions when much may be at stake (e.g., critical issues, funding, time) is a skill unto itself. To learn about CBR, immersion in collaborative relationships creates experiential learning opportunities. How do graduate students navigate these relationships as learning tools, particularly the feelings and emotions that arise?

Through this project, we set out to learn about reflecting on feelings and emotions that arise among graduate students and university mentors in the context of first-hand experiences in CBR. The contextual point of reference is the Science Shop and its initial five years of programming from 2009 to 2013. The Science Shop is offered by the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) at the University of Alberta (UofA) in partnership with the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP).

We worked with a qualitative design, particularly a focused-ethnographic approach with students and their university-based mentors regarding their experiences in the Science Shop. The program's Research Coordinator and Academic Lead were resources for the study. We invited participants to reflect on past experiential learning about CBR, particularly feelings and emotions, through critical dialogue in student-mentor pairs, a group of students, and a group of mentors. We adopted an interpretive-description approach to inform the development and implementation of curricula; the practice of CBR; and scholarship about engagement.

CBR relationships may be conceptualized as a learning tool. As students, mentors, and staff in the Science Shop related in this project, learning through "layers of mentorship" and relationships in CBR can be an intense experience, likened to a rollercoaster, waves, waterfall, and free-fall. A great deal of "emotional energy" may be required, and potentially gained through collaboration. An openness to developing "soft skills" is helpful. Finding a "fit" is necessary between student interests and needs, mentor interests and needs, mutually beneficial CBR activities relative to community interests and needs, and time (i.e., more than the four months currently supported by the program). Creating time and space to express and reflect on feelings and emotions as an individual and/or with others involved in the CBR experience is critical for making the learning experience transformative.

One of the potential outcomes of CBR is individual and/or social transformation – that individuals and groups not only are able to effect change of some sort but are also changed as a result of collaboration. With enhanced understanding through this project, we offer insights into designing and implementing experiential learning about CBR, a type of critical engagement. By extending the timeline (beyond the existing four-month structure) of the Science Shop, the additional time would be a resource for:

- (i) *supporting the development of "fit" between students', mentors', and community partners' interests and needs;*
- (ii) *collaborative responses to critical community issues; and*

- (iii) *supporting student reflection on feelings and emotions that arise in experiential learning about CBR.* Development of reflective (or “propositional”) skills amid the experience is worthy of curriculum support.

When “fit” occurs and reflection is practised, the Science Shop supports optimal, transformative experiential learning about CBR. The outcomes can be tremendous: graduate students attuned not only to product but also to process, through first-hand knowledge of relational skills.

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