

Taylor J. Arnold
Oberteuffer Scholarship Essay

My research career and doctoral studies take a holistic approach to health equity, specifically by investigating and intervening upon the health and safety of hired Latine child farmworkers. My interest in health education and promotion began during my Master's degree while studying medical anthropology at the University of Memphis, and working on a dairy safety initiative for immigrant Latine workers in Wisconsin. I observed firsthand the effectiveness of culturally appropriate health and safety education for improving worker health. However, I also noted the limitations of worker power to enact change and the critical need for management to support the implementation of safety efforts. During these formative graduate school years, I experienced the importance of community-engaged research toward health equity. I worked to document the longstanding Environmental Justice (EJ) struggles among segregated Black communities in Memphis, which culminated in a grassroots EJ conference that brought together academics, practitioners, activists, and legislators.

The action-oriented skills and interests I developed while working with these diverse communities translated well into my public health research career at Wake Forest University School of Medicine (WFUSM) and doctoral studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). For over six years, I successfully managed the implementation of the *Hired Child Farmworker Study*, a longitudinal mixed method study at WFUSM. This highly impactful research examined the health and safety of hired Latine child farmworkers in North Carolina (NC). We grounded the research in the lived experience of the rural Latine youth farmworker community by using a community based participatory research (CBPR) approach that included youth themselves as co-investigators and advisors. I personally collected a significant portion of these data in the field, and supervised a team of staff covering twenty NC counties. It has been a deep privilege that shaped my approach to engaged research as dozens of rural Latine families welcomed me into their homes as an outsider and shared with me about their lives. I have led and co-authored over twenty quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods manuscripts from these data, representing a significant contribution to this literature. We have delineated how the organization of work and work safety culture in agriculture relate to dangerous exposures for Latine youth such as chemical exposure, heat, and physiological strain, and the resulting health outcomes including injury, heat-related illness, respiratory, and reproductive health outcomes. Further, I used a structural vulnerability framework to link children's reasons for working in farm work and their educational experiences to broader

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sociopolitical injustices. In addition to high impact contributions to the academic literature, we have disseminated specific study results through infographics, award-winning policy briefs, and popular media articles through a collaborative CBPR process. I have presented results from the project with dozens of academic, practitioner, and community audiences and this research has continued uptake in media and policy realms.

In addition to national efforts on protecting child workers, I have contributed to international efforts to address child labor. From 2019-2020, I completed a technical consultancy for the International Labor Organization (ILO), where I served as the quantitative and qualitative methodological expert and evaluated research examining Child labor in Tobacco in Malawi, US, Brazil, and Indonesia. The project culminated in travel to Indonesia to audit the field research process, speak with multiple stakeholders, and collaborate on the final report.

Upon completion of my PhD in the Department of Public Health Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, my goal is to obtain a faculty role that will facilitate the further development of my policy-relevant line of research and student-focused teaching. The networks I have developed within the academic and broader community allow for an engaged research agenda that responds to the need for evidence-based approaches to improving child and adolescent health. A faculty role will allow more latitude for shaping my research agenda and ensuring that projects are grounded in the lived experiences of the communities I partner with. Therefore, I plan to seek extramural funding in partnership with community organizations that work with rural Latine youth in North Carolina, including Student Action with Farmworkers and NC FIELD. I also plan to continue and expand my involvement in coalitions such as the regionally-based Farmworker Advocacy Network and nationally-based Child Labor Coalition.

I bring all of my research experiences and my own background as a first-generation scholar to my goal of impactful teaching with diverse student populations. Ultimately, I view my classroom as a place where the boundaries between theory and community-engaged practice are malleable, and where transformation is an explicit goal. Therefore, my teaching goals center on engaging students to think critically about health education and promotion through experiential learning and case studies. In courses such as Global Health, Immigrant and Refugee Health, and Determinants of Health, we interrogate how Social Determinants of Health shape disparate

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health outcomes. We engage in theoretical and practical discussions, and build practical methodological skills that transfer into future health promotion careers or academic careers.

Another professional goal of mine is to mentor students to achieve their own health education goals. I have mentored over a dozen students, including high school, undergraduate, graduate, and medical students. I have taken these students to help conduct field research, co-authored manuscripts and conference presentations, and used my professional network to connect students to resources and opportunities. Many students I have mentored have gone on to receive full scholarships, attend medical school, or work in public health careers.

I have seen the tangible effectiveness of advancing child health through my current research partnerships to address the health and safety of Latine youth farmworkers. This research has reinvigorated a debate about legal exemptions for agricultural child labor spanning nearly a century, and influenced legislative efforts to protect children. Most recently, our research was featured during a US House Committee on Education and Labor hearing about child farmworker workplace protections. I also participated as an expert witness on a recent forum with officials from the US Department of Labor about the health hazards of tobacco work.

My future work has a high potential for continuing the trajectory of advancing the health of children and youth. My dissertation research, funded by a grant from the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Safety and Health, is a qualitative examination of the work, school, and health experiences of Latine child farmworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Generated by a CBPR approach, the exploratory-qualitative design involves novel collaborative community methods throughout, including youth-focused free listing to inform interview content and collaborative "research poetics" to inform preliminary analyses. The long-term goals of this study are to contribute to improvements in health and educational outcomes for rural Latine youth by documenting their lived experiences during the pandemic, ultimately providing insights for public health practice, structural interventions, and future emergency preparedness.

In addition to improving the health and safety of Latine youth, additional research projects that I manage have a strong potential for advancing the health of other populations of youth. First, I am examining how migrant and multi-generational immigrant experiences of stressors affect epigenetic, behavioral, and health-related outcomes. This research has future implications for the importance of fostering supportive and healthy environments for children

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and youth during critical periods of development. Second, I manage a study that is developing a Youth Engagement approach for opioid use disorder prevention. This project centers the importance of including youth in a meaningful and equitable way in the design of youth opioid misuse prevention programming.

In summary, my diverse research experience and skillset spans methodological divides in an effort to inform policy leading to health equity for vulnerable youth populations. I collaborate with community groups using to drive the research process, because I believe authentic academic-community partnerships represent a powerful lever for social change. The Oberteuffer Scholarship would help offset the tuition costs associated with finishing the write-up of my dissertation and achieve my future goals of contributing to health equity from the perspective of health education and promotion.