

Service-Learning from the Perspective of Community Organizations

Alexis Petri

University of Missouri-Kansas City

As a central construct in the theory of service-learning, reciprocity for community partners is not often the subject of scholarship, especially scholarship that seeks to understand the benefits and opportunity costs of service-learning. This article explores how reciprocity works in higher education service-learning from the perspective of community partners. Through interviews, the study asked 24 community partners of a Midwestern private, not-for-profit university about their perspective of service-learning. The qualitative study used constructivist grounded theory to gain insight into the experiences of community partners.

Keywords: community-campus partnerships, service-learning, reciprocity, community partners, evaluation, community engagement

Introduction

I have been working in service-learning for the past 14 years in a variety of positions at two different universities. As a director of service-learning, I have worked hard to develop solid partnerships with community organizations that are characterized by reciprocity for the community partners and the students. When completing my dissertation, I decided to learn from the community partners of another university about their experiences. This essay presents my findings and my critical reflection about those findings.

Many years ago I learned about the importance of reciprocity in service-learning partnerships the hard way. I was a new service-learning director, starting a new program at the university where I worked. Service-learning was gaining momentum as a movement. I helped faculty members secure partnerships for their classes and did not have a vision for service-learning partnerships. I responded to the faculty members wanting placements for their students. In my quest for sites, a community partner left me a voicemail message that embarrassed me and caused me to rethink my approach to my work. He told me that he didn't need college students to serve who don't need anything from his organization or the people he serves. The following two scenarios demonstrate before and after points of view, based on this experience, that defines reciprocity and later became the foundation of my dissertation.

Two Scenarios

Many service-learning outcomes hinge on the interaction between the students and the community partner. The following two scenarios will illuminate the difference reciprocity makes to service-learning. Scenario one begins with a group of sophomores at a Midwestern university sent to cook and serve meals at a soup kitchen.

The kitchen is a busy place and the staff members, while few in number and overworked, are a dedicated bunch who are committed to obtaining food and sharing it in a way that allows for those in need of it to retain as much human dignity as possible. The students arrive and do not know what to do; they have never before served a meal for hundreds of people, and they do not know how a commercial kitchen operates. The busy, overloaded staff now has the burden of quickly training and preparing these students to serve food while attempting to make them feel welcomed. The students process the situation through the emotional shock of trying to work in an unfamiliar setting, facing unknown expectations as they serve food and interact with lower-income individuals they may not ordinarily meet. Everyone muddles through and there is a variation of experience and outcomes with each person involved. In this scenario, there is very little reciprocity and the community organization is in the position of using staff resources to help the students complete their service hours.

In scenario two, the faculty member and service-learning director visit the community partner to ask about the needs of the organization. The community partner notes a need for regular Friday night kitchen service help, and recommends that students dine at the soup kitchen to observe how it works. The faculty member presents the course activities and goals to the class for the service-learning project, and describes how the service and learning are intertwined. A discussion of which students will serve at what location begins, and they recognize that this soup kitchen location will take a larger commitment than the other locations. One student who has restaurant server experience volunteers to be a group leader and help his fellow students at the site. Their commitment to the project makes the community partner open up to the students and teach them about food insecurity and community organizing. The students begin to ask questions about the United States and hunger. The students advocate with the university administration, asking that students with extra meal plan points at the end of each semester be allowed to donate them to a meal points pool. The university's food service company would then use the pool to buy food in bulk and make a donation to the community partner twice a year. This becomes a sustainable, durable partnership for the community organization. The faculty member gains visibility for the service-learning project and makes it an ongoing part of his course. The community partner can feed an increasing number of people a wholesome meal. In scenario two, there is a high level of reciprocity between the college student service-learning program and the community organization. I suggest that the reciprocity is an important part of the overall quality of the service-learning experience for the community partner, the faculty member, and the students.

Understanding the Community Partner's Experiences of Service-Learning

Faculty and administration sometimes assume all service is created equal (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006). After all, community organizations have access to higher education's most precious resource—students. No one sets out to ask more of community partners than they receive in return. On the other hand, what are the experiences of community partners? How does the project make room for contributions from all participants? As the decades wear on, the reviews are mixed. Higher education's

dalliance into community issues may cost community partners more than they receive (Stoeker & Tryon, 2009).

Campus Compact's (2000) *Benchmarks for Campus/Community Partnerships* present best practices for forming effective partnerships between a college or university and community partner organizations. These benchmarks are equally applicable for service-learning, applied research, or other outreach efforts of campuses to surrounding communities. The first benchmark for building collaborative relationships is that the partnership is "composed of interpersonal relationships based on trust and mutual respect" (Torres & Schaffer, 2000, p.6). While these benchmarks are over a decade old, their wisdom resounds because building enduring, meaningful partnerships requires a commitment to democratic principles, sharing a vision, articulating values, and mutually benefiting community organizations and the college or university (Torres & Schaffer, 2000). In other words, service-learning requires partnerships characterized by reciprocity.

Reciprocity is a central, important construct of service-learning. The literature on service-learning stresses the importance of reciprocity between higher education and its community partners for students to experience the level of transformational learning necessary to be inspired and feel empowered to take action toward social change. In service-learning, reciprocal learning is fundamental: "service-learning is a philosophy of reciprocity which implies a concerted effort to move from charity to justice" (Jacoby, 1996, p.13). Many service-learning scholars and practitioners are adamant that high-quality service-learning is characterized by reciprocity between the college/university and community-based partners and their clients. Without reciprocity the service is more like charity and lacks shared experience and transformation (Pompa, 2002). Approaching the service-learning partnership with a sense of reciprocity made the difference between scenarios one and two. Small steps toward reciprocity produce real results: taking the time to plan the project together, inviting students to learn from the community partner, recognizing the contributions community partners make to student learning, and making room for the leadership students can bring to a complex community issue.

For purposes of this study, reciprocity was defined as two or more parties that take collective action toward a common purpose and in the process the parties are transformed in a way that allows for increased understanding of a full variety of life experiences, and over time works to alter rigid social systems (Henry & Breyfogle, 2006). While reciprocity is a common term in the service-learning literature, this more general definition encapsulated the elements that differentiate service-learning from community service required for a class to high-impact teaching and learning.

A growing body of work is assembling that seeks to understand the community partners' experiences (Bushouse, 2005; Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Tryon, Stoeker, et al, 2008; Dorado & Giles, 2004). The extant literature on service-learning suggests that the overall value of service-learning to community partners is generally assumed as long as the project itself is designed well (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006). Community/campus partnerships are seen as satisfying when the partners perceive the outcomes as being proportionate to what they each put in to the relationship (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). The depth and complexity of partnerships develop over time. Most

partnerships begin as transactional: one-time events and short-term student placements. When the partnerships become characterized by joint creation of knowledge, then the relationship becomes transformational. By the nature of the partnership, the transactional stage has an exchange-based and utilitarian focus (Eons & Morton, 2003; Dorado & Giles, 2004). Transformational partnerships are characterized by higher degrees of reciprocity because the parties are planning and acting together toward a common goal (Bushouse, 2005). The ultimate challenge of service-learning for community partners is whether its benefits are significant enough to invest scarce resources in the student learning project (Bushouse, 2005). To increase reciprocity, colleges and universities must find ways to decrease the economic costs for community partners in service-learning (Bushouse, 2005).

There are tensions between academia and society; tensions not just around what students learn and how they learn it, but around the way higher education does business both internally and externally (Enos & Morton, 2003). To truly have reciprocal partnerships between campus and community would mean finding relevance, prioritizing and respecting partnerships, supporting faculty who seek them out, and recognizing the community as a co-teacher of students. The service-learning movement has volunteered itself as the “standard bearer for a revolutionary redefinition of the nature of scholarship and institutional transformation” (Hollander, 2010, p. ix). In doing so, the movement has placed most of its academic energy on making its case based on evidence of student outcomes to institutionalize service-learning because faculty roles and rewards were not changing and academic affairs budgets were tight. The community partners’ voices have not always been present in the forming of policies and structures to support community-based experiences for students (Butin, 2010).

Methods

The purpose of this research was to ask service-learning community partners about their experiences with higher education service-learning, with a focus on the concept of reciprocity. The study used constructivist grounded theory, which provided a rigorous framework for undertaking qualitative research that allows participants to be engaged with the project (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2007; Charmaz, 2005). The following were the research questions for the study:

1. What are the community partners’ experiences with higher education service-learning?
2. Reciprocity is a definitional characteristic of service-learning. Do community organizations experience reciprocity when they partner with institutions of higher education for service-learning?
3. How does higher education service-learning contribute to the community organizations where students do their service-learning?
4. From the community partner perspective, what do their organizations contribute to student service-learners?

Setting

The study focused on the community partners of a small not-for-profit, private university located in a large Midwestern city. To preserve anonymity, the university and its demographics are not provided.

Participants

The participants of the study were individuals who work for organizations that partner with the university for the purposes of service-learning. The main intent was to reach out to a representative group of participants from a variety of organizations (schools, health-related nonprofits, issue-focused nonprofits, local governments, and umbrella organizations), and from a variety of positions within those organizations (classroom teacher, volunteer director, executive director, social worker). All of the participants needed to have experience working with college students as volunteers in their organizations.

At the beginning of the study, the university service-learning director and the director of community relations recommended a total of 41 organizations that were established community partners. From this list, the researcher began inviting nonprofit professionals to participate in the study, taking care to interview an array of organizations that represented the concentrations of service-learning in the university's curricula. The technique of "snowballing" (Cresswell, 2007) was used to obtain participants based on referrals of other participants when it became clear that certain areas of nonprofits were not represented. In total, 24 community partners participated in the study, a number that was based on gathering enough data to reach saturation (Cresswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

At the time of enrolling in the study, participants were invited to share demographic information, but they could also opt not to share demographic data. All participants completed the enrollment form and shared demographic data. The study participants were 8.3% African American; 4.2% Asian; 4.2% Latino; 83.3% White. As a group, the study participants were 83% female. Study participation was bounded by the interested community partners of the college service-learning program, and as a result was not diverse. This bears out one of the limitations of the study, which is lack of diversity. The study participants had a strong educational background with 87.5% having a college degree. The educational background of study participants more closely reflected the college personnel's educational attainment than that of the surrounding region. Participants represented nonprofits in the following sectors: public social benefit (n=1), education (n=8), environment (n=2), health (n=5), and human services (n=8).

Interviews

Study participants were asked about their experiences in semi-structured interviews for one hour. The interview topics were based on a thorough review of the literature as well as an informal community conversation about the topic. The protocol was reviewed and edited by two faculty members from different universities who were

experienced with service-learning and two nonprofit professionals with experience in service-learning (these professionals did not participate in the study).

Each interview with a community partner was held at a location the community partner identified as convenient—often at work, in a conference room, or sometimes at a nearby coffee shop. After each interview, the researcher typed a transcript and wrote a memo noting observations of the interviews. This was a helpful way of reflecting on the interviews.

Coding

Interviews and analyses for the study were conducted according to constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This includes identifying themes through a sequence of coding stages: open, axial, and selective. Through open coding, transcripts, documents, and memos were analyzed and coded into categories using the constant comparative approach. This step reduced the universe of collected data to a small group of categories that were most relevant to the topic being investigated (Creswell, 2007). After the transcripts were typed and coded each community partner was invited to review his or her transcript and how the transcript was coded. Transcript review forms were returned by 20 of the 24 participants. The participants then had the opportunity to make corrections to ensure their ideas and experiences were interpreted correctly. Four of the participants made changes to the transcript—they added or changed their own words to clarify intent. This triggered changing how the transcript was coded. The other participants returned only the form and did not have changes.

From the concept names, 75 categories, or open codes, were noted. The open category that appeared most frequently in the data was then identified as the central phenomenon. Once this selection was made, the researcher returned to the data collection to determine how the categories related to the central phenomenon. Seventy-five codes were used during the open-coding process. This process fractured the data into many different segments. The next step, axial coding, attempted to unify it. During the axial coding sequence, the researcher reviewed the data to understand how the coding categories explained a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Reciprocity was the central phenomenon in this study.

To determine the axial codes, the second stage of coding in grounded theory, the codes were analyzed in such a way that connections were built between the codes. Special attention was paid to codes that appeared together frequently. The open codes that had the greatest density (were used most) became the axial codes. The axial codes that were the most grounded, or had the greatest number of connections to other codes, became the selective codes. In this manner, the selective codes emerged from the very beginning open codes. Table 2 shows the resulting axial and selective codes that compose the widest range of conditions while still relating back to the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007).

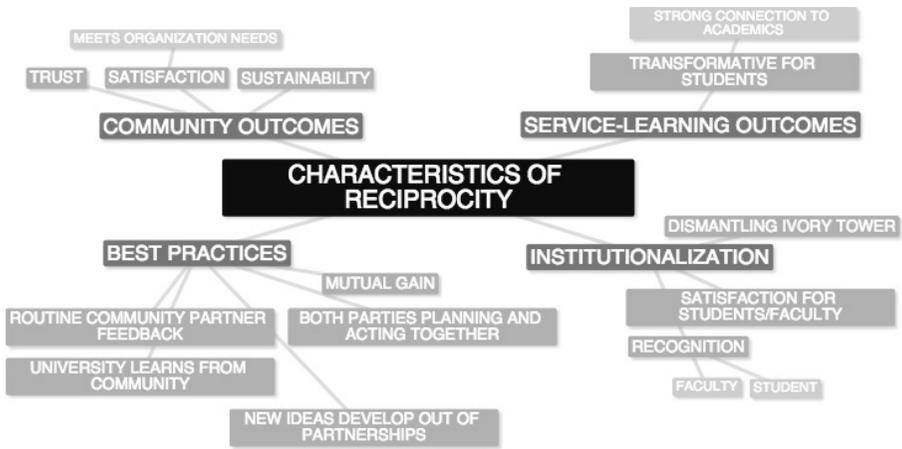
Table 1. Analytical Mapping

Selective Codes (4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reciprocity drives community partners' outcomes. 2. Community partners value students' learning outcomes. 3. Institutionalization of service-learning matters to community partners. 4. Community partners want to contribute.
Axial Codes (15)	<p>Satisfaction Institutionalization Sustainability Service-Learning Partnerships Characteristics of Service-Learning Partnerships Student Learning Challenges Solutions/Best Practices Academics Outcomes Forming Relationships Careers Social Justice Faculty Diversity</p>
Central Phenomenon	Reciprocity
Open Codes (75)	75 open codes identified from the interviews, for example: authentic community perceptions, sustainability, community partner as instructor, importance of communication, reciprocity, better preparation of students by college, transformative for community partner orgs, challenges, discourse, unequal relationships between servers and served.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis and discussion section will begin with an examination of how the open codes are related to reciprocity. Figure 1 shows the codes co-occurring with, part of, or associated with reciprocity. The diagram shows how each of the selective codes (dark gray) are related to reciprocity through the axial codes (light gray).

Figure 1. Diagram of Codes Co-Occurring with Reciprocity



Challenges Associated with Service-Learning

Nearly every participant discussed the challenges of service-learning from a community partner perspective. The challenges are well-known to those who support or teach service-learning courses. Often, organizations expressed a struggle with setting realistic expectations for the project. Students come with energy and enthusiasm, community partners are ready and willing to teach the students about their issues, but the project at hand falls flat. There was also a learning curve for community partners when it came to understanding logistics and the pace of a fifteen-week semester. Community partners expressed that their first semester was lackluster. Another common challenge discussed was a lack of follow-up and closure. These common challenges will surface in the discussion of the selective codes. The remainder of this section presents each of the selective codes with supportive quotes from the interviews and discusses the connection between the selective codes and reciprocity.

Selective Code 1: Reciprocity drives community partners’ outcomes

According to the Henry and Breyfogle (2006) definition of reciprocity, the concept goes much deeper than students going to a community organization to essentially volunteer as a means of fulfilling a requirement. Based on the participant interviews, reciprocity seemed strongly related to collaboration. Participants expressed the importance of thinking about how to sustain the project, what drives their satisfaction, and building trust through relationships that do not recreate the typical campus-community divide.

While college students made wonderful role models, a majority of the community partners interviewed wanted them to stay longer than the required commitment: “Long-lasting relationships really make a difference.” Trust was a common ingredient for building reciprocity, and it takes time for trust to build. Another community partner

noted, “It could help with the temporariness of the relationship to know that the students gained a lot from the experience.” Knowing that the college students benefited from the opportunity was also connected to community partner outcomes. The community partners expressed that their outcomes were dependent on the student outcomes.

Because the community partner outcomes are also dependent on student outcomes, the most common challenge for them was a lack of feedback from the university, especially about student outcomes and what the organizations could do to enhance the students’ experiences. Another challenge for the community partners was for closure. “We rarely hear from the students again. Sometimes we hear from the faculty member...I feel like we really cherish the students and invest our time in them as people and then it all just evaporates...It makes me wonder if my contribution is valued or if it is expected.”

One way to heighten reciprocity and increase organizational outcomes that surfaced from participants in education and youth-focused organizations was to have “involvement on the part of the people who want the kids to do this. That way, they [the faculty] could really see the benefits.” Another factor in ramping up community outcomes related to reciprocity was to have joint reflection sessions. “Maybe we get together with their students and our students through some kind of forum to ask questions...Maybe take a couple hours and just put them all together and discuss the tutoring program.” Taking these kinds of steps toward investing in a long-term service-learning partnership would strengthen the sense of reciprocity across all constituencies.

Selective Code 2: Community partners value students’ learning outcomes

A long-term outcome for community partner participants was to mentor the next generation of nonprofit leaders, who “may one day take up our cause and advance it. In that way, service-learning is wonderful for nonprofit organizations.” The organizations depicted a sense that they were teaching organizations, and wanted to connect with students of all ages for their own benefit as well as the benefit of their clients.

The opportunity for students to experience a level of socio-economic, cultural, and racial diversity not present at the campus was an important feature of the experiences of the community partners.

The experience of poverty; the experience of hunger; the experience of being alone. These are all experiences that are everyday occurrences that...probably have rarely happened in college students’ lives...We also can help college students see they can make a concrete difference. When they come here they have a face and a name to [the issues] and maybe will see they can be part of the difference...

When discussing the importance of reciprocity specifically, the community partners drew connections between their feelings of reciprocity and the hope that the service-learning experience was transformative for students.

They learn that we don’t bite [laughter]. When they first get here they think they’ve walked into a scary place. But even by the end of their initial visit, they’re much more comfortable. It dispels all of those types of fears. [College] students really get more out of it and

they've told me that. They came to bring something to our students and wind up walking away with more than they brought.

What the students walked away with was knowledge, authentic experience, and self-efficacy—all of the desired outcomes associated with service-learning. From the community perspective, student outcomes are increased when they come to the organization as learners and volunteers, not solely as volunteers. When service-learning loses its focus as a balance between service and learning, and slips into being more about service, it tends to compete with the service that traditional volunteer groups perform. The community partners enjoyed opening up an expanded worldview for the students and teaching the students about complex community issues.

The fact that the community partners described the benefits of hosting college students so explicitly underscores their insight as partners in transformational learning.

Many college students are future leaders by the fact of where they're going to get a job on a higher socioeconomic level. And therefore it can actually create real change if they have community experience now. Meaning if you don't know what it's like to be poor or don't have the experience of that then you'll never have the idea of I can give back.

More than having extra hands on deck to address community needs, participants representing human services organizations and health organizations described a willingness to mentor serious students. "We've gotten pretty hard in the orientation this time, challenging them [the service-learners] to think about themselves and their roles. To think about their futures and maybe we can connect them with other situations." Another respondent explained:

It's a joy for students to be able to see that they can be hands-on and see that they're making a difference. The college students are great about off-site activities especially. They're great at things we might need help with outside of our facility because they have a little bit more flexibility and willingness to go out and help. And I like to think they are taking up the cause in a way that is reinforced by their studies.

While this study did not focus on outcomes for college students, the community partners still mentioned them. This was partly because the college students figured so largely into the sense of reciprocity; it mattered to the community partners that the students also benefited from the experience. The community partners discussed this as though they were instructors and collaborators, expressing a desire for working together on projects, and some mentioned partnering with the service-learning instructors for research or joint grant proposals.

Selective Code 3: Institutionalization of service-learning matters to community partners

How the university officially recognizes and supports service-learning was important to the community partners' sense of an activity being mutually beneficial.

Aspects of institutionalization permeated the interviews: student preparation, student recognition, faculty preparation, faculty recognition, and service-learning program support and visibility from executive leadership. The community partners wanted to know whether university leadership valued service-learning and what universities did for their students as recognition for their service-learning activities. They felt that when a college or university takes steps to ensure institutionalization and sustainability, the college or university was also sustaining its relationships with community-based organizations and valued the learning opportunities those partnerships afforded college students.

The community partners expressed an interest in how the university prepared the service-learning students and recognized them as service-learners: “I think letting students know what the requirements are before they sign up for the course would be good. Students need to know it is a service-learning course and will have different expectations.” Another community partner pointed out: “Students should be getting some different type of recognition for their service-learning. What do these projects count for in student terms? If the projects mattered more, would the challenges be lessened?” Many universities note service-learning courses on student transcripts and have structured orientation sessions to prepare students for their community work. Institutionalization of service-learning was more than just transcripts and orientation sessions; it was also how service-learning experiences were incorporated into the broader context of earning a college degree.

The community partners did not place the burden of building partnerships between community and campus solely on the university. They repeatedly offered ideas and suggestions. “Yes, I think the college faculty members motivate the students. In a perfect world we would have a larger [name of org removed] staff that could focus on colleges and universities. But right now we’re in a time of fiscal hardship.” The community partners expressed genuine interest in working on the system to develop and more fully incorporate service-learning into higher education. “I remember from my own college days that faculty members care about efficiency. To me, a forum that brought together community organizations in need of service-learning partnerships with faculty in need of partners would more quickly get at the heart and art of reciprocity.” The community partners also wanted to build more of a relationship with the faculty members around the service-learning: “Does this type of activity count as a job duty for the instructors? For me, it is part of my job and my executive director wants me reaching out to college students. So I know it is an accepted use of my time.”

Selective Code 4: Community partners want to contribute

Community partners felt a relationship with a college or university had reciprocity when they also made a valuable contribution, such as when there was joint creation of knowledge. One of the difficulties that surfaced repeatedly in the interviews and analysis was with the connection between faculty members and community partners. Community partners who had strong relationships with faculty members and a direct connection to classes described stronger outcomes. For example, a community partner saw opportunities to build relationships beyond service-learning. “We would

welcome universities to do research here. I think that would be great. Sometimes there are grants out there that they might have and need to come here and conduct research.” The community partners saw additional opportunities as part of reciprocity: “I think universities, generally, should see us as partners in discovery. The nonprofit sector has changed with the times. We are educated and can provide an important stakeholder perspective on research.” Building broader partnerships between community and campus was seen as the ultimate goal, with service-learning playing an important role in the partnership.

As far as reciprocity goes, one participant noted, “I feel like we get more than we give. It is nice to have ongoing relationships and it would be awesome if we could give as much as we get from the area universities.” Communities and higher education need each other, and that need continues to increase.

Implications and Limitations

As a qualitative study originally completed for a dissertation, this study could serve as a foundation for a larger quantitative study, perhaps even one that is national in scope. As mentioned in the literature review, there is a growing body of research that examines community-campus partnerships for service-learning. This study was designed to learn from community partners about their experiences with service-learning and their perspectives on service-learning. Looking at the selective codes, one code stands out as unexpected: institutionalization of service-learning matters to community partners. The main implication for future research is to design a study that looks specifically at the relationship between reciprocity in community-campus partnerships and the degree of institutionalization of community engagement efforts, whether associated specifically with service-learning or examining engagement more broadly.

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation concerns the nature of dissertation work in some disciplines. The purpose of a dissertation is to demonstrate research skills and knowledge and does not always allow for the participation of others as co-researchers. For this article, a more participatory action research approach involving community agencies, students, and faculty in its design and implementation would have been more beneficial. However, in order to overcome this limitation, community agencies were invited to review and revise transcripts in order to ensure that their voice and meaning were captured appropriately.

Another limitation concerns the sample size. Constructivist grounded theory methods underscore the importance of gathering data from a diverse sample so that the topic being studied is fully explored. While a sample size of 24 was sufficient to reach saturation, the study would have been stronger had the sample been more racially, ethnically, and gender diverse. A third limitation to this study is participant bias and threats to trustworthiness. I tried to identify times when I suspected that participants were saying what they thought I wanted to hear, or may have felt obligated to paint a positive picture of situations that were not completely positive. To minimize this, I emphasized that participation in the study was confidential and that they would not be connected by name or organization to findings.

Conclusions

As colleges and universities turn to service-learning as a solution to rejuvenate teaching and learning at the postsecondary level of education, it is vital that they include community partners at all levels of decision-making. Meaningful, high-quality service-learning comes through seeking reciprocity not only through projects but also through how service-learning is supported at the university. The constructivist grounded theory analysis applied to the 24 community partner interviews produced four selective codes. These four codes work together as a set of ideas for how colleges and universities could enhance their relationships with community partners:

1. Reciprocity drives community partners' outcomes.
2. Community partners value students' learning outcomes.
3. Institutionalization of service-learning matters to community partners.
4. Community partners want to contribute.

Community partners want to see that their investment in the service-learning partnership is valued by the college/university. Through reciprocity, communities and campuses collaborate for a common purpose and as a result, both parties experience changes that allow for increased understanding.

This study's findings confirmed the results of Stoecker and Tryon's (2009) broad-scale work published in *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning*. The one area that was different and unexpected was the community partners' interest in how, or whether, service-learning was institutionalized at colleges and universities. The participants repeatedly discussed how a perception of service-learning as being marginalized at the university makes the community partners feel less important. In many ways this surprise finding shows the importance of reciprocity for the community partners: they value the outcomes of the project and care about what students learn. They want to make a real contribution.

Community partners routinely mentioned a few simple things that would make a big difference for them. Three community partners mentioned that seeing final reflection reports (without student names) would be very helpful to them. The organizations would use reflection papers to understand more of what students are learning from their experiences, discern ways their service-learning could be enhanced, and also report student learning outcomes to their boards and funders. For the community partners, this would heighten the sense of reciprocity as they gain deeper insights into what the experience meant for the students and how the students connected it to their studies. Knowing how the service-learning projects contribute to their own missions can help community partners when they must make decisions about continuing their partnerships. They can better determine if their perceived return on investment (reciprocity) is in line with the value of their time and effort spent on the students.

Service-learning naturally appeals to faculty members who value learning in the community context, or they would not take the extra time and effort to teach service-learning courses. If part of service-learning is to build partnerships and projects that are characterized by a high degree of reciprocity, the institutional standing of service-learning matters beyond its standing in the classroom. When service-learning is marginalized at the institution, it is interpreted as marginalization of the community

partners. If it is celebrated by the instructor or department but not evenly practiced throughout the institution, that discrepancy is felt by the community organization. The community organizations understand sustainability and have sophisticated operations. They survive in a structured, symbolic leadership context and want to feel connected to the leadership of the university. From the perspective of community partners, having service-learning that is fully institutionalized is one way to accomplish successful reciprocity.

The joint creation of knowledge, while at the heart of reciprocity, is also provocative because it begins to dismantle the meme of the university as an ivory tower. Historically, the university has generated knowledge and has been at the nexus of innovation. Increasingly, knowledge and innovation happen in places that are not part of the traditional university campus. Entrepreneurs innovate. Educators of grade school students produce knowledge about best practices. The concept of building the joint creation of knowledge while dismantling the ivory tower was, from the community partner perspective, an important approach to establishing sustainable service-learning programs that are characterized by high degrees of reciprocity.

Whether the ivory tower can be completely deconstructed was not the focus of this study. Rather, when it came to blurring boundaries pertaining to who creates knowledge, who contributes, and who does the work, the community partners that participated in the study felt there was room for innovation and reform. Colleges and universities send students to community organizations to gain knowledge and apply theory in ways that cannot be practiced in the classroom or campus environment. It is important for service-learning faculty and personnel to realize the role they play in bridging the campus and community gap, and their role in providing continuity as different students rotate through long-term partnerships. Service-learning program personnel should strive to build partnerships characterized by reciprocity and help faculty understand the significant impact of reciprocity for project outcomes and student learning.

References

- Basinger, N., & Bartholomew, K. (2006). Service-learning in nonprofit organizations: Motivations, expectations, and outcomes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 12*(2), 15-26.
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2002). Campus-community partnerships: The terms of engagement. *Journal of Social Issues, 58*(3), 503-516. doi:10.1111/1540-4560.00273.
- Bushouse, B. K. (2005). Community nonprofit organizations and service-learning: Resource constraints to building partnerships with universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 12*(1), 32-40.
- Butin, D. W. (2010). *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage hand book of qualitative research*. (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Dorado, S., & Giles, D. (2004). Service-learning partnerships: Paths of engagement. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 11*(1), 8, 25-37.
- Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby & Associates (Eds.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (p. 20-41). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Henry, S. E., & Breyfogle, M. L. (2006). Toward a new framework of “server” and “served”: De(and re)constructing reciprocity in service-learning pedagogy. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 18*(1), 27-35.
- Hollander, E. (2010). Foreword. In D. W. Butin, *Service-learning in theory and practice: The future of community engagement in higher education* (pp. vii-xii). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jacoby, B. (1996). *Service-learning in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mason, J. (2007). *Qualitative researching*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Pompa, L. (2002). Service-learning as crucible: Reflections on immersion, context, power, and transformation. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 9*(1), 67-76.
- Stoecker, R., & Tryon E. (2009). *The unheard voices: Community organizations and service learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Torres, J., & Schaffer, J. (2000). *Benchmarks for campus/community partnerships*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

Tryon, E., Stoecker, R., Martin, A., Seblonka, K., Hilgendorf, A., & Nellis, M, (2008).
The challenge of short-term service-learning. *Michigan Journal of
Community Service Learning*, 14(2),16-26.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Please provide an overview of the volunteer force at your organization. Could you tell me what portion of your volunteers are students in college?
2. What are some of the things that students typically learn at your organization as a result of their service-learning? Do you see the personnel at your organization as instructors to the students when they are on site?
3. What does having college students as volunteers add to your organization? For example, does the volunteerism of college students help your organization extend its mission? If so, could you give an example?
4. How do you think the students' projects help your clients, or do they?
5. Tell me about cost factors involved—do students as volunteers save money, cost money, or does it come out about even?
6. What are some of the challenges?
7. How could colleges be better partners or collaborators? What are some of the things, large or small, that colleges do that facilitate students getting involved with your organization?
8. How does your organization make working with college students productive?
9. Tell me about your thoughts pertaining to reciprocity and college students—do you think there is mutual gain for both your organization and for the college by collaborating for student learning/volunteering? Have you observed any changes in yourself, your colleagues, or your clients due to having college students as service-learners?
10. Is there anything you said in the process of this interview that you would not like to be used as an individual quote in any publication based on this research? *If a direct quote is used, your identity will be kept confidential.*

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank the community partners who invested their time and shared their knowledge for this study.

Author

Alexis Petri, Ed.D. director of interdisciplinary training at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development, has fourteen years of experience as a program director of service-learning at two universities -- University of Missouri Kansas City and Rockhurst University. Alexis teaches service-learning courses at UMKC as well as works with faculty, instructors, and community partners to design academic service-learning projects that extend classroom-based learning to a real world context. She has designed and co-facilitated multi-day, faculty workshops on service-learning course design, building campus-community partnerships, and evaluating service-learning projects. In addition to her work with service-learning, she is co-principal investigator and project director on two National Science Foundation studies, serves as evaluator for three federally funded projects, and directs an interdisciplinary graduate certificate program. Her research areas are access to postsecondary education, civic engagement, service-learning, evaluation, data visualization, and cities.