

## Voices from the Community: A Case for Reciprocity in Service-Learning

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*Few studies have directly examined how recipients of service view the service. This qualitative study presents the results of interviews and observations of nine community members who participated in a service-learning, language exchange program, Intercambio, in which Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants were paired with English-speaking university students to teach each other their native language and culture. The development and study of Intercambio was informed by Freire's theory of critical consciousness and results supported his assumptions. Findings include: community members changing views of university students (i.e., from admiring them to seeing them as imperfect equals), changing views of themselves (i.e., from feeling helpless to finding a voice), as well as changing views of social issues (i.e., from impossible to solvable). Results favor a service-learning class format where community recipients can have expert roles (i.e., teach Spanish, too, rather than only being tutored), knowledge is assumed to be co-created and multi-directional, and ample time is devoted to dialogue about current social issues.*

The core aspirations of service-learning, to increase civic engagement in students and narrow the distance between universities and communities (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007; Mattson, 1998; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997), appear to have lost momentum (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2008). Social problems are as difficult as ever (e.g., economic crisis, immigration and health care reform, Afghanistan and Iraq invasions) and service-learning is better positioned, in terms of legitimacy, funding, research, and following, to fulfill its mission than in the past (Billig & Eyler, 2003; Kiely, 2005). So why the plateau in this urgent movement (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2004)?

Saltmarsh et al. (2008) argue that universities might be suffering from a survival instinct that prevents further advancement of service-learning. The very legitimacy of the university depends on being perceived as having expert, objective, universal knowledge to impart. The university's very existence might be questioned if those without credentials or degrees manage to solve society's ills (Brukardt et al., 2004; Saltmarsh et al.). Service-learning advocates an opposing epistemology: a need for knowledge to be local and co-created with (rather than for) the community. There has been a loud call for more reciprocal exchanges between universities and communities to awaken service-learning from its inaction (Saltmarsh et al.). This age-old call (see Dewey,

1938; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992) has powerful rhetoric but difficult application.

For example, how do you teach democratic civic engagement while remaining apolitical? Many university-community partnerships are funded by entities (e.g., federal government) that would frown at a political agenda or partisanship (Saltmarsh et al., 2008). How do you equally serve the needs of the community members and university students, when only one pays tuition? How do you conduct research without imposing the academy or funders' lens on the data (Patton, 2002)? It is easy for the university, financially dependent and behaviorally entrenched in its expert role, to see the community as deficit-based and impose expert solutions (Himley, 2004). Thus, instead of creative, reciprocal, empowering partnerships to alleviate poverty, for example, service-learning takes the form of tutoring the poor. Tutoring is a safe choice: the university benefits from community exposure and the community members receive needed help. But safe does not necessarily mean transformative, as these uninspired interventions tend to replicate existing patterns of power.

### Listening to the Community

The 'recipients of service' are likely to provide the most honest assessment of the success of service-learning. If service-learning is bridging the distance between ivory tower and brick houses, transforming

neighborhoods, or increasing civic participation, the community members would take notice. Service-learning research on the community perspective is rare and recent (Worrall, 2007), as it lacks financial and motivational backing<sup>1</sup>. The little existing research on the community focuses on the partnership between the university and community as the unit of analysis (Clarke, 2003; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Worrall). Results show that the community benefits from partnering with the university by gaining access to resources and knowledge (Eyler, Giles & Gray, 1999). Also, the community is more receptive to service established collaboratively (Clarke; Dorado & Giles). The more engaged the community is in planning and implementing the service, the more committed the partnership grows over time (Worrall).

Though encouraging, these studies inevitably cast the university in a positive light. Administrators of community-based (generally nonprofit and small) organizations are unlikely to repudiate or jeopardize a partnership with a well-funded university by making negative comments in a university-sponsored survey. The best they can do is ask for more voice in the collaboration. Qualitative methods—interviews, observations, and field notes—might yield rich results until the community served is better understood (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Perhaps an observation that university students are more “on the way” than helpful, or less courteous than expected would be captured. Qualitative methods’ attention to the details and complexities of lived experiences can foreground the perspectives of the understudied and underserved, illuminating issues central to the community. Such community perspectives could help quantitative researchers in developing surveys that might better gauge community needs (Creswell; Patton).

Schmidt and Robby (2002) conducted one of the few qualitative studies on the service recipients’ opinions. They interviewed 260 mostly Latino and low-income elementary school children and their teachers about the service-learners who tutored them. Results showed that children were more satisfied with tutors who valued diversity and social justice. The children’s teachers gave high ratings to tutors who expressed intentions to be involved in civic action. The authors also found that similarities in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of the tutor and child were a predictor of success, as was attribution of causality of the child’s problems. That is, a tutor who thought the child did not learn because of laziness and stupidity behaved differently than a tutor who felt that the child did not learn because of inadequate school resources. Service-learning could reinforce existing stereotypes rather than challenge them. Given that one of the goals of service-learning is to improve communities, then understanding the per-

spectives of service recipients is essential. Schmitt and Robby provide a valuable glimpse at the complex variables that may underlie good service giving and receiving.

### Beyond Tutoring: A Reciprocal Exchange

The present study aimed, in its praxis and research, to engage the community in a reciprocal exchange. Qualitative interviews with nine community members who participated in a mutual, language-exchange program called *Intercambio* is presented. In *Intercambio*, Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants were paired with English-speaking university students to teach each other their respective native language and culture. The format of *Intercambio* and the research method were deliberately chosen to empower the community members to be on equal ground with their university counterparts. Community members had a valuable asset to teach (i.e., the Spanish language). In addition, the chosen research method, a long-term qualitative approach, allowed for community members to gain the trust to express themselves openly about their experiences.

Spanish-speaking community members and university students met for three hours a week for nine months in *Intercambio*. For the first half, pairs practiced English and Spanish. During the second half of the class, the group reflected together on a social problem. This investigation examined if and how community members changed as a result of *Intercambio*. Specifically, we examined (a) How community members engaged in *Intercambio*, (b) How community members viewed university students, given that they generally come from different backgrounds and levels of privilege, (c) What participants gained, if anything, from reflecting on social problems as a group, and (d) What actions, if any, participants took as a result of *Intercambio*. Ideally, community members would engage in honest dialogue, gain a deeper understanding of themselves, others and social problems, and be compelled to action (Freire, 1970).

### Theoretical Framework

The development of *Intercambio* and this research was informed by Paulo Freire’s (1970) theory of a critical consciousness. Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian pedagogue who wrote his dissertation on John Dewey (1859-1952) and furthered his work by painstakingly describing the emotional roller-coaster that accompanies realizing one’s position of privilege or oppression. His theory divided the world into oppressors and oppressed who need to dialogue to escape the dehumanizing conditions in which they co-exist. The oppressors tend to be people who hold

## Intercambio and Centro Romero

the economic and political power in our society, and tend to be unaware of the problems of those who hold little power, the oppressed. The university students in this study might be viewed as Freire's "oppressors" and the impoverished immigrants as the "oppressed."

According to Freire (1970), honest dialogue between oppressors and oppressed can slowly translate into a more socially just society. Through dialogue, the power shifts. The oppressed, who at first admire the oppressors, come to see examples of vulnerability in them and begin to value their own knowledge (Freire). The oppressors, who may have dismissed the oppressed as ignorant or lazy, come to value their perspectives. In this form of education, teachers pose real problems, and students of different backgrounds learn by examining the issues at hand. Following Freire's lead, Intercambio was designed so that community members were on equal footing with university students (i.e., both taught each other), rather than being served by them (e.g., as translators, tutors). This partnership promoted honest dialogue, which, we wondered, might lead to a more complex understanding of reality and a desire to change unfair aspects of that reality (Freire).

According to Freire (1970), the highest stage of learning is *conscientización*, which refers to the awareness of social problems to the point of intervening to change them. An individual who is *concientizado* understands a social problem, places it in a historical context, critically reflects on its causes, views the problem as solvable, and acts to alleviate it (Freire). The *concientizado* recognizes his or her place, and contribution, in the struggle for liberation. The oppressed *concientizado* stops expecting that the solution comes from the oppressors and works toward resolving the problem. And the oppressor *concientizado* listens to the wisdom in the oppressed, rather than ignoring their voice or imposing what he/she thinks is the solution. *Conscientización* is a lengthy, multi-step process that includes: coming together with people of different backgrounds and levels of privilege, engaging in an honest dialogue, reflecting on social problems and one's contribution to them, and acting to ameliorate the issue. Freire's framework was used in the design and study of Intercambio.

### Method

An ethnographic approach (Berg, 2004) was used in this study by conducting participant observations and multiple, one-on-one interviews with community members. The goal of this study was not necessarily to generalize to other service-learning recipients, but rather to contextualize the experience of a group of urban, low-income Latino immigrants who participated in a service-learning program.

Intercambio is a Spanish-language exchange class of approximately 20 students, half Latino immigrants and half university students who meet at Centro Romero for three hours a week. Centro Romero is a community agency providing a variety of services to the immigrant Latino population in Chicago, including citizenship preparation, youth after-school programs, leadership programs, ESL, GED, and literacy classes (Centro Romero, 2004). The first author served as a facilitator of Intercambio during the course of this study and beyond (2003-2005).

The first half of class was dedicated to foreign language textbook exercises that students did in both languages. These exercises encouraged partners (i.e., one university student was paired with a community member) to get to know one another's background, as well as practice vocabulary. Before taking a break, the class usually participated in a game or presentation. The second half of class was a reflection, exploring cultural, power, and class differences between the community and university students. This section is consistent with Freire's (1970) call for dialogue between the oppressors and the oppressed.

Community members and university students read stories and articles related to social issues, and then reflected on them in a group format. The reflection topics included immigration reform, neighborhood violence, job prospects after graduation, and the war in Iraq. Some topics mostly impacted community members, some mostly impacted university students, and some impacted both. Depending on the topic, the reflections were tense and/or entertaining. The first author facilitated dialogue by translating community members' and university students' comments and posing questions. As Intercambio members learned more Spanish and English over the year, they learned to speak for themselves rather than through a translator.

Intercambio discussions tended to be democratic, with university students and community members sitting in a large circle and taking turns to share their often opposing views. For example, in one class students talked about the war in Iraq and whether they would go or not go to Iraq. Most undocumented, male Latinos said they would "of course" go to defend "their" country, and seemed surprised to hear many of the university U.S. citizen students say they were unwilling to go to war. These conversations were respectful and organized, with people listening and tolerating vastly different opinions from their own. In another class, Latino immigrants discussed the various parts of cars made in Mexico (e.g., tires, frames, motors) but how Mexico could not make a "full" car. University students discussed Detroit and

disinvestment following migration of labor to work at Mexican car factories. On another occasion, university students came in holding Starbucks' coffee cups and the discussion centered on the coffee trade and production. Two Latino community members had worked in coffee plantations and discussed how coffee was cultivated and processed. An openly-gay university student mentioned that Starbucks offers insurance to gay couples, which few businesses do. Fair-trade coffee, international markets, and gay rights all entered the debate. Again, these conversations were sometimes tense and ripe with disagreement, yet remained generally respectful in tone and order.

### *Participants*

The first author recruited the community members by presenting Intercambio to various Centro Romero classes and programs. Any community member with a minimum of 80% attendance in two consecutive academic quarters (i.e., 22 weeks) of Intercambio was eligible to participate in this investigation. Nine community members participated, and they varied in age, background, and immigration history. Their ages ranged from 17- to 57-years-old with a mode age of 25. Six (67%) students were originally from Mexico (2 from Mexico City and 4 from small towns), two (22%) from Quito, Ecuador, and one (11%) from San Salvador, El Salvador. Approximately half were undocumented immigrants (56%), and most had working class jobs (e.g., construction worker, busboy, housekeeper, driver) in which they earned between \$10,000 and \$40,000 per year. Some had finished college and practiced their profession (e.g., teacher, chemist, and lawyer) in their country of origin before immigrating to the U.S. Most community students' family of origin was low-income with an education of high school or less. In contrast to the community members, the university students tended to be more homogenous in age (18-22) and socioeconomic status (primarily middle class) and they were legal U.S. citizens. University students were recruited from Spanish 101 courses at a local university.

### *Procedures*

*Participant Observations.* As facilitator of Intercambio, the first author directly observed the program for nine months and wrote detailed field notes immediately after class regarding the weekly topic, participants present, who partnered with whom, how each student behaved during class, and who said what during the reflection.

*Interviews.* The field notes guided the development of the interview protocol. Participants were interviewed in June, 2004 (Time 1) and September, 2004 (Time 2) by the first author. Informed consent was conducted with each participant before interviews

began. Time 1 interviews lasted approximately 45 to 75 minutes, and Time 2 interviews lasted 20 to 45 minutes. After completing both interviews, participants were compensated with a \$15 gift certificate to Borders Books and Music store. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

### *Data Collection Measures*

Three measures were employed in this study: (a) a demographic information sheet, (b) Time 1 interview, and (c) Time 2 interview. The demographic sheet collected information about age, gender, race/ethnicity, race, marital status, education, employment, and immigration history. The Time 1 interview protocol was composed of four sections. The first section asked community members how they initially viewed Intercambio's reflections and how their impressions and participation changed over time. The second section asked how participants' perception of university students changed, if at all, as a result of the class. The third section asked community members for possible solutions to the problem of undocumented immigration and if they aware of any changes in their own attitudes toward these and other social problems. The fourth section focused on participants' reported behavioral changes. Sections 1 to 3 of the Time 2 interview protocol were similar to the Time 1 protocol, but some were shortened to avoid redundancies and some were expanded based on participants' Time 1 responses. The fourth section asked about participants' actions (e.g., voting, watching the news) to capture any changes in behavior.

### *Data Analysis*

The field notes and interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) inductive approach to data analysis. The first author coded paragraph-by-paragraph, asking "what is happening here?" to develop a code for that data piece. At first, she used descriptive codes, which simply depict the phenomenon at hand (Miles & Huberman). After gaining more experience with the data, she interpreted the underlying meaning of the data. Theoretical codes also emerged from Freire's theory (1970). Pattern coding was also conducted, which was more inferential and explanatory (Miles & Huberman), and occurred after the first author gained more familiarity with the data and began to see recurring themes. She also used N-Vivo (QSR International PTY Ltd, Version 2.0, 2000), a qualitative software program, to assist in the analysis.

*Enhancing the credibility of findings.* One of the ways to increase the rigor of qualitative research is to enhance the credibility of findings, i.e., the extent to which the findings reflect participants' experiences rather than the researcher's experience and point of



view. Peer debriefing, prolonged engagement (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), repeated interviews, triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and member checking were used to enhance the credibility of findings. Peer debriefing refers to sharing findings with disinterested peers and professionals to keep the researcher honest and decrease bias (Lincoln & Guba). In this study, the first author shared her codes with fellow Intercambio staff and researchers not involved with Intercambio to ensure her interpretations of the data made sense and to control for any researcher bias. Triangulation involved collecting observation data throughout program implementation along with multiple interviews of each participant. Collecting multiple forms of data at multiple time points allowed the researcher to compare the data to ensure interpretations were correct. Member checking involved presenting the researcher's interpretations of the data to participants to ensure that the interpretations are valid and represent their experiences (Lincoln & Guba). Member checking was conducted in two ways in this study. First, the second interview of each participant served as a member check because the researcher summarized the responses from the first interview and obtained feedback from the participant. Second, after all observation and interview data were collected, the first author presented the study findings to two randomly selected participants and obtained their feedback. Only two participants were selected at this point because all had the opportunity to participate in the first member check. Participants verified the findings and provided more examples of study themes. Altogether, conducting the aforementioned steps provides more confidence in the study findings.

## Results

### *How Community Members Engaged in Intercambio*

*Shy But Inclusive.* Participants invariably reported feeling nervous and awkward during the first few Intercambio classes, given the newness of the situation and communicating in a foreign language. Most community members were inclusive in their participation, putting forth much effort to communicate. University students and community members patiently tried to get to know their partners, using sign language, dictionaries, drawings, or help from the facilitator. Community members were quiet and shy at the beginning of the class toward both the English- and Spanish-speakers. It took them a while to warm up to each other even in their own language. Eventually, they began to take breaks together and to share stories, problems, and even jokes.

### *How Community Members Viewed University Students*

*Mas Confianza.* Community members reported feeling more trust (*mas confianza*) and comfort toward each other as time passed. A natural extension of feeling more comfortable was a reduction in stereotypes, particularly toward the university students. Community students stopped seeing the university students in terms of class or race, and began to see them as human beings with stories, aspirations, and struggles similar to their own. Participants said they found a partner they liked, got to know them, felt at ease in spending time with them, joked around, and asked more personal questions over time. After a while, the exchange was so fun that students 'forgot' they were communicating in another language

Gloria<sup>2</sup> (age 36): Con el tiempo mejoró porque al principio yo sentía cerrados [a los estudiantes de universidad] y después ya había confianza entre todos, inclusive como que ya no te daba pena si te equivocabas o no, al principio como que decías, 'No yo mejor no hablo porque si el sabe mas se va a reír de mi.' Verdad? Y ya al final como que hasta nos ayudabamos asi indirectamente decias como se decia una cosa y aprendias...hubo mas compañerismo, mas acercamiento..mas confianza.

(With time it improved because at first I felt [the university students] were closed and then there was trust between everybody, even like you didn't feel embarrassed if you made a mistake or not. In the beginning you would say, 'I better not speak because he is going to laugh at me.' Right? And at the end we would even help each other indirectly you would tell them how to say one thing and you learned...there was camaraderie, more closeness...more trust.)

*Less Trusting Toward Cliquey University Students.* Although participants reported feeling *mas confianza* overall, they felt less trust toward a group of four university students who they termed as "cliquey." These four students did not behave in an inclusive manner; they bonded with each other and formed a clique. They usually complained about the class exercises and exchanged inside jokes. They were disrespectful to their partners, the reflection process, and the Spanish language. For example, a university student added the word 'taco' to various sentences, ignored his partner by text-messaging on the phone, and often requested "to please leave early."

Cliquey behavior made an impression. All community members talked about them in the interviews, referring to them as the 'bad ones,' 'negative ones,' 'young ones,' and 'snobs' (*fresas*). Oscar described his reaction to the clique.

Oscar (age 28): Con el primer grupo no había respeto. Llegaban y se sentaban y no te saludaban. Es cosa que no tienen que hacer. Muchos se distraían, jugaban. La verdad no me gusto estar con ese grupo. Eran como antipáticos. Pues casi no se reunían con nosotros en los break, bueno pues hablaban muy poco. Siempre eran un poco separadores ellos de nosotros.

(With the first group there was no respect. They would arrive and sit and not say hello. It's things they are not supposed to do. Many would get distracted, play. The truth is that I didn't like being with this group. They were kind of unpleasant... Well, they would not meet with us during the break for the most part; they would speak very little. They were always a little separate from us.)

Gloria, a student who had been very positive in describing others, explained that she felt ridiculed by some of the clique, university students. María reported she was glad when members of the clique did not show, especially when her partner was absent.

María (age 42): Con el tiempo...nada me interesaba ya con ella...nada. Ósea si venía o no. Es mas...cuando yo venía y ella no había llegado yo decía, 'Ay! Que bueno que no vino así me ponen con otro.' La verdad porque ella de plano así mirando el reloj 'A ver a que horas se acaba porque ya me quiero ir.' Ósea yo me sentía incomoda...Me desagradaba trabajar con ella. Y ya no después ya no me gusto. Inclusive, si te fijaste, ya falte varios días...Ósea trataba de hablar con ella en español y en inglés y ya total ninguno de los dos me respondía, ósea como que no sé era mas 'Mhmm, ok,' y se reía.

(Over time...nothing interested me with her...nothing. I mean if she came or not. Even...when I would come and she hadn't arrived, I would say, "Ay! That's good she didn't come so they put me with someone else." I mean I would feel uncomfortable...I disliked working with her. And then after I didn't like it. I even, if you noticed, I didn't come for some days...I mean I tried to talk to her in Spanish and English and in neither of the two she would respond, I mean it was like I don't know only 'Mmm, ok,' and she would laugh.)

Because of the clique behavior, three community members requested a change in partners, and two stopped attending the class, stating they felt uncomfortable with the constant banter of the clique students. On the other hand, some participants learned to stand up for themselves as a reaction to the clique. Over time, community members placed limits on the

clique students' banter and side conversations, asked them to be quiet, or asked them to "care about" certain social problems. When faced with continued lack of interest, community members began to realize understanding and solutions to social problems central to their life (i.e., undocumented status) might be up to them, not others.

*Humanizing the Other.* As community members got to know university students, they began to forge an openness and understanding of each other as human beings. Many said, "they are just human like me." Before humanizing the other, community members felt feelings of inferiority given their limited power as undocumented immigrants and limited English language skills. Humanizing the other helped participants feel more equal to the university students.

Gloria (age 36): En el comienzo yo los veía así como, si dice uno como, una como que los ve superiores a uno, no? Por que estudian, por que pues son diferentes...es lógico, no? Entonces como que después dices, 'Ay estos muchachos que tranquilos'...como dicen que trabajan, que una dice que es mesera y así. Igual con William, me contaba de la familia, que vive solo, que tiene su gatito y que extraña a su mamá y así cosas así, no? Entonces...ya después viéndolos y tratándolos como eran, que son igual a nosotros.

(At first I would see them like, if one says like, one sees them as if superior to oneself, no? Because they study, because well they are different...it's logical, no? Then after a while you say, 'Ay these people are calm'...like they say they work, one says she is a waitress and like that. Same with William, he was telling me about his family, and that he lives alone, that he has a cat and misses his mother and things like that, no? So...after seeing them and treating them as they are, they are just the same as us.)

Humanizing the other took unexpected forms as well. Some community members humanized the clique group, justifying their negative attitude as normal given their sheltered upbringing. A few participants reported letting go of previously held stereotypes toward African-Americans.

María (age 42): Y yo siempre le hecho la culpa de muchos problemas a los morenos... Entonces cuando se hablaba de las gangas, yo casi siempre pienso en que los que comandan todos esos son morenos, verdad? Porque desgraciadamente así siento... cierto rechazo, cantidad de rechazo, hacia lo que hacen. Pero pero ya cuando ya me acercaba a Jamiko o ellos, ósea, tu ves que es lo mismo que les pasa a ellos con nosotros. Tu sientes que todos son iguales entonces cuando ya te acercas con un

moreno...ves que no todos son iguales...Se van limando las asperezas entre grupos, no?

(And I feel that I always blame Black people for many problems...So when they talk about gangs, I almost always think that they are run by Black people, right? Because unfortunately that is how I feel...a certain dislike, a lot of dislike, towards what they do. But when I would get close to Jamiko or them, I mean, you see that it is the same thing that happens to them towards us. You feel that we are all equal when you get close to a Black person...you see that we are all the same...You begin to polish the rough spots between groups, no?)

*Stereotyping the Other.* Some comments suggested that community members went back and forth between letting go of long-held stereotypes and humanizing the other. For example, Esperanza openly stated stereotypes of African-Americans as “lazy” and of university students as “spoiled brats.” Esperanza later contradicted her own statements, saying that she learned in Intercambio that many university students work and attend school full-time and that African-American students work especially hard. The contradictory nature of her statements belied the tension between long-held stereotypes and her new understanding.

#### *What Community Members Gained from Reflecting on Social Problems as a Group*

*Learning to Speak Up.* Many community members were familiar with the topics discussed in the reflections, such as fair trade coffee. Joaquín worked as a child migrant coffee farmer in Mexico; Esperanza grew coffee and chocolate in her backyard in Mexico. They embraced the reflections by speaking about their experiences with the harvest, which in turn seemed to strengthen their confidence in speaking up about other issues.

Joaquín (age 19): Pues te daba ganas de opinar [en la reflexión]. Aprendimos a desenvolvernos más y a expresar sus ideas. A no quedarse con ellas. Mmm, a manifestar su opinión ósea no, como ósea, no tener miedo de decir lo que piensas.”

(Well you felt like giving your opinion [in the reflection]. We learned to open up more and express your ideas. To not keep them to yourself. Mmm, to manifest your opinion I mean, like like, I mean to not be afraid to say what you think.)

When community members spoke openly about their experiences, they realized they possessed worthwhile knowledge. At the beginning of the course, participants looked up to university students because of

their college education. The reflections helped community members appreciate that despite their marginalized status in US society, they had valuable information and perspectives. Moreover, university students lacked some information (e.g., immigration, trade) despite being more educated. Thus, community members began to speak up more in the group, as well as look to one another, searching for answers to their social problems. In some topics, such as women or gay/lesbian rights, university students knew more and were more open than the participants. When reflecting on these topics, the university students were the ones informing the community students and pushing them to be more open and fair.

*Reflection as Support Group.* The reflections were often tense, with people confronting each other’s opinions, and community members and university students shifting in their chairs uncomfortably as they listened. Continued discussion of controversial issues was a strong lesson in communication. Community members learned to approach and disagree with people with differing opinions. Participants viewed the reflections beyond an opportunity to listen, speak up, or learn facts. It was also a support group, where people could unburden themselves emotionally by realizing their many shared problems. Perla described the class as a place to “desahogar” (unburden yourself) of problems that may cause you to feel “vergüenza” (shame) in other settings. Likewise, María described it as a place to “reafirmar las opiniones que muchos tenemos de las soluciones” (reaffirm the opinions that many of us have of the solutions) to social problems such as bringing the community together to end violence or advocate for immigrant rights. Thus, many participants appreciated the reflections as a supportive and safe place where they could connect with others to find solutions to social problems rarely discussed openly.

#### *Actions of Community Members as a Result of Intercambio*

*Reflective Actions.* Many participants discussed issues with family members or became more informed about issues by watching the news or reading the newspaper. These were termed reflective actions because the goal was to become more informed or to inform others. All participants reported varied reflective actions. Gloria was partnered with an openly gay university student for a year. At first prejudiced against gays, she slowly became more informed about gay rights and she spoke to her family about the need to openly accept gays in the Latino culture. Some participants began to read the newspaper or watch the news more regularly.

Joaquín (age 19): Al principio no me gustaba

ver las noticias ni ver el periódico, pero como te digo, osea, empezamos a hablar de este tema...si me, ahorita ya veo las noticias y leo el periódico y me informo a cerca de todo.

(At first I did not like to watch the news or see the paper, but how do I say this, I mean, when we started talking about these issues...yes I, now I watch the news and I read the paper and I inform myself about everything).

*Infrequent Actions.* Some participants engaged in small, infrequent actions related to social issues. The most common infrequent actions reported were registering to vote, if they could, and/or serving as a translator in the street or workplace. Community members translated for others because they realized they had something to offer and felt solidarity with the recipient of their help.

Edgar (age 18): Si [Intercambio] me cambió porque, te digo, antes si veía a un Latino que no sabe hablar el Inglés, no me daba por ayudarle. Me daba lo mismo. 'Que se las hiciera solito' pensaba...Pero ahora no. Osea, estoy en el restaurante y hay gente que no sabe hablar o pedir las cosas, entonces este, yo les digo o les digo como les digan.

(Yes [Intercambio] changed me because, I tell you, before if I saw a Latino that did not speak English, I wouldn't feel like helping them. I didn't care. 'Let them work it out alone' I would think...But now no. I mean, I am in the restaurant and there are people that do not know how to talk or ask for things, so then, I tell them or I tell them how to say it.)

*Committed Action.* A few community members reported participating in committed actions, which involved ongoing, time-intensive dedication. María was perhaps the most impacted by Intercambio. She enrolled to be the head teacher at a literacy class.

María (age 42): De no haber venido [a Intercambio] y no ver que, por ejemplo, que venía gente que apenas había aprendido a leer y escribir y venía a estas clases pues que ósea que como no te mueve. Y nada y tu sigues igual en tu rutina y no te importa. Pues algo tengo que hacer, no? No nada mas hablar, sino hacer las cosas. Mmm, pues me surgió por la idea que te digo, de que ósea, no solamente quiero hablar sino actuar. Y en la clase [de alfabetización] a veces...a veces me siento bien porque viene gente mayor que esta trabajando y...los admiro, no? Porque están tratando de aprender inglés o comunicarse con los americanos sin saber muy bien leer ni escribir entonces es bueno...Eso me motiva mas a venir. Si tu puedes dar un poquito de tu tiempo haciendo algo ósea, porque no hacerlo, verdad?

(If I had not come [to Intercambio] and not seen, for example, that people would come who had just learned to read and write, they would come to the classes and that, I mean, it kind of moves you. And nothing and you go on the same as usual in your routine and you don't care. Well, I have to do something, no? Not just speak, but do things. Mmm, well I had the idea that I told you about, of y'know, not just talk but do things. And in the class [of literacy] sometimes...sometimes I feel very good because I see older people who are working and...I admire them, no? Because they are working and trying to learn English or to communicate with the Americans without knowing how to read or write very well and it is good....That motivates me to come. If you can give a little bit of your time doing something why not do it, right?)

*Hopelessness: Roadblocks to Action.* Some participants had difficulty admitting their societal advantages/disadvantages, which prevented them from taking action. Francisco blamed Latinos' poverty on their laziness and denied any structural barriers, such as immigration and poverty, that might negatively impact Latinos.

Francisco (age 34): Pero el Latino es bien flojo. La verdad. Sí, ósea que no no como que en cierta parte le importa y a la vez no.

(But the Latino is very lazy. The truth. Yes, I mean that no, no, like, like in a way he cares and in another he doesn't.)

Many community members felt hopeless about issues affecting undocumented immigrants. They stated, "Problems are too big to resolve," "It's beyond me," "I can't do anything," "I don't want to start helping because it will consume me," "It's not my fault," "It will never change." Edgar readily recognized the many social problems faced by immigrants, but did not want to help because he felt it was useless to do so.

Edgar (age 18): Pues yo he visto que (risa). Yo no ayudaría [en resolver problemas sociales]. Pero he visto que muchos hacen huelgas o todo eso por tratar que nos traten de dar licencias y todo eso. Pero creo que es muy imposible, y digo 'ah' y me desanimo a poder ayudar en eso. Porque muchos van y en las noticias dicen que 'si a lo mejor' pero despues de un rato te dicen que no. Que siempre no.

(Well I have seen [laughs]. I wouldn't help [resolve social issues]. But I have seen many who do strikes and all that to try to help so that we have driver's licences and all that. But I think it is impossible, and I say 'ah' and I don't feel I can help with that. Because many go and



in the news they say 'yes maybe' but then after a while they say no. Always no.)

### Discussion

There is a hesitation in the field of service-learning to place the community in an expert role (Himley, 2004; Saltmarsh et al., 2008). In theory, most service-learning courses assume the community has a deficit that the resources or expertise of the university can help alleviate (Brukardt et al., 2004; Saltmarsh et al.). In practice, university students tend to come down from the ivory tower to tutor or translate or help the community (see Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999; Schmidt & Robby, 2002), and community members are rarely asked how they feel about the service received (Clarke, 2003; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Worrall, 2007). Recently, service-learning scholars have been advocating for university-community partnerships that view the community as possessing knowledge and assets, such that the university and community can work together to co-create solutions to social problems (Saltmarsh et al.).

Intercambio offers a template for how a reciprocal, asset-based, community-university partnership might look in a service-learning course. English-speaking university students and Spanish-speaking community members met weekly to teach each other their language and culture, and to discuss current social problems. In using a reciprocal teaching/learning format, knowledge flowed bi-directionally. That is, rather than the knowledge flowing only from the university to the community, community and university participants had an equal say in co-defining social problems and co-creating solutions (Saltmarsh et al., 2008). Our research results were positively supportive of the potential for reciprocal exchanges, at least in the eyes of community members.

The community members studied<sup>3</sup> seemed genuinely transformed by the service experience, and emergent themes in the qualitative data generally agreed with Freire's (1970) theoretical framework. To summarize, community members reported feeling *mas confianza* toward university students who were polite and helpful, and distrust/frustration with cliquey university students who were seemingly disinterested in learning. Over time, community members came to see the university students, cliquey or polite, as human beings with dreams, problems, and aspirations similar to their own. Thus, a reduction of stereotypes and seeing each other as human beings took place. Finally, the reflections, which were heated, bilingual debates on current social issues allowed community members to admit to themselves they had worthwhile information to contribute. Moreover, the absence of knowledge or lack of interest displayed by

university students allowed the community members to look to each other for answers. Community members seemed to realize that they had to rely on themselves for the betterment of their own lives, rather than on others. The reciprocal class format seemed effective in empowering community members students to speak up, trust their views, and look for solutions.

Three elements of service seemed essential for community members' success: (1) a reciprocal, long-term engagement between people of different backgrounds and levels of privilege, (2) ample time to reflect on current social issues, and (3) an acceptance that reflections might be uncomfortable, awkward, or downright painful. These elements will be discussed briefly as service-learning seems to historically advocate for such ingredients, but hesitate to apply them (Brukardt et al., 2004; Himley, 2004; Saltmarsh et al., 2008).

The first ingredient of community members' success in Intercambio is accepting the community has worthwhile knowledge to impart. When the spirit of reciprocity is central to the service-learning course, the community members feel encouraged to teach the knowledge they possess. Reciprocity is key because community members are often so powerless in our society's hierarchies (e.g., illiterate, poor, undocumented, limited access to resources) that it takes time for them to hear their own voice, to value their opinion, and to speak up. If the university students had served as tutors in Intercambio, the weak voice of the community members would have likely stayed quiet. In fact, community members may have to be granted the role of the expert, not of an equal, on many topics in order to speak up. Another way to look at this is to accept that it also takes time for university students/faculty to admit they are not experts in various areas, nor saviors of the community, but equal partners who sometimes know a lot less than their community counterparts. However, if genuine reciprocity is in place, these truths seem to become self-evident over time.

The length of the discussions and community-university engagement was another essential ingredient. Because recent Latino immigrants and university students in Intercambio had very different backgrounds and levels of privilege, discussions tended to be rich, controversial, and lengthy. People generally had an interest in understanding the topics because they were contemporary. The room contained a plurality of opinions and experiences. Disagreements were common, and it required ample time to listen, to talk them out, to accept or reject dissimilar opinions. Time was necessary both for the argument to develop, but also to digest and develop new ideas over the course of weeks. Thus, lengthy engagements and reflections seem best to encourage the development of trust among dissimilar others and allow for knowl-

edge to be exchanged and digested.

The third and final key ingredient present in Intercambio was the acceptance that transformative dialogue is often difficult, awkward, and painful. Community members reported feeling disrespected, angered, even ridiculed by some university students. This might be difficult for the university to hear. After all, when service-learning faculty commit to sending university students to impoverished communities of color, they do so hoping that university students will behave in a polite, caring, and helpful manner. Service-learning research would greatly benefit from admitting that some university students display arrogance, ignorance, and disinterest, as indicated by the community participants in this study. However, university students' cliquy, condescending behaviors seem to be a necessary, normative stage for both community members to become empowered and university students to come to terms with their privilege. This study, for example, showed that community members' growth, in part, depended on instructors' most feared university students' behavior (e.g., rudeness, disinterest). In seeing the lack of interest in the university students, community members ended up turning to themselves for answers to their own social problems. As described by Freire (1970), feeling inferior or superior, haughty or offended, cliquy or excluded, is part of the process of dialogue that leads to a deeper understanding. Time and reciprocity in Intercambio seemed to allow for negative feelings to be processed and understood. Community members, for example, excused cliquy behavior in university students because they realized these students were "young" and "did not know better," but this forgiveness took time. Thus, difficult, negative feelings can be seen as part of the process of dialogue.

### Limitations

There were some limitations in this study. Results were circumscribed to an Intercambio class at one community agency where the first author served as the facilitator. Thus, it is difficult to separate the study findings from her involvement both as facilitator and researcher. Her inevitable bias existed in the class content, facilitation, research protocol, interview, and analysis. However, she took a number of steps to enhance the credibility of findings, such as triangulation and member checking. Additionally, this study examined only a small group of participants in one program in a community of Latino immigrants. Individuals in other communities may react differently to various types of service-learning programs.

### Suggestions for Future Research and Practice

The reciprocal exchange in Intercambio appeared to be transformative for most community members.

Future research on community reactions to reciprocal exchanges are needed to validate this approach. A study that compared reciprocal to non-reciprocal class formats would yield valuable information, especially if the community members' sense of empowerment was the focus of the research. Thus, an English-Spanish mutual exchange class could be compared to a course where English is taught by university students to community members. Future research also could examine the application of reciprocal formats to other, varied populations. For example, a study where university students engage in an equal exchange with less advantaged African-American youth might yield very different conversations and results than a language exchange program with Polish immigrants or impoverished farmers.

Even across varied populations, however, similar themes are likely to emerge as a result of the reciprocal format. This study found Freire's (1970) theory invaluable in outlining the emotional roller-coaster that may accompany reciprocity in learning/teaching. For example, in this research, community members perceived some university students as haughty or uninterested. Freire explained that this reaction might be normative as those with privilege might not have previously recognized their inherent advantages, and might resent becoming aware of this privilege. In other words, discovering oneself to have privilege can cause considerable anguish (Freire). Research could look at university students' reactions to reciprocity compared with arrangements in which the students are the experts. In short, future research could extend reciprocal approaches to other populations, continue to apply and examine Freire's principles vis-a-vis service-learning, examine university students' reactions to reciprocity, and most importantly, compare reciprocal to non-reciprocal models.

The authors encourage service-learning practitioners to attempt to flatten traditional societal power differentials in developing and implementing community-campus partnerships rather than replicate them. Even when service-learning is designed for university students to tutor community members, instructors could add a 30- to 60-minute reflection during which social issues are discussed as a group, allowing for co-creation of knowledge. Ideally, reciprocal exchanges could be implemented in multiple settings, from impoverished schools to prisons to homeless shelters. In practice, instructors can expect anger and resistance and work to address such feelings in appropriate ways. Specifically, faculty can help community members and university students move past negative emotions by normalizing the feelings as part of the growth of coming to terms with one's place in society, providing emotional support, and challenging them as human beings to improve their behavior.

Teachers could address putdowns of self or others, cliquy behavior, and use of cell phones, as they were particularly detrimental to sincere participation in the dialogue in Intercambio.

### Conclusion

Service-learning practice and research tend to shy away from equal exchanges. However, language-acquisition, for example, seems tailor-made to fit a reciprocal exchange. The advantages of learning a language in-context, in-vivo, from a native speaker seem obvious enough. And with approximately 30% of U.S. residents stating they speak a language other than English at home (www.census.gov/census2005), universities could easily access pockets of foreign language speakers. Yet, the various programs combining service and language acquisition invariably place university students in the role of tutors or translators (Camacho, 2004; Green, 2001; Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999; Plann, 2002). It is rarely an equal exchange.

The university's resistance to embrace reciprocal service-learning might parallel the behavior of the university's cliquy students. It is difficult to give up power to the community or grant wisdom to the lowest rungs of our society at various levels: intellectual (Dewey, 1938), emotional (Freire, 1970), and financial (Brukardt et al., 2004; Saltmarsh et al., 2008). After all, the university is accountable to the tuition-paying-student who, on spring break might complain to his/her parents that s/he is learning from an undocumented immigrant, an inmate, or a homeless individual out in the community, rather than a Ph.D faculty member in a classroom. It is easy to see how pedagogues would hesitate to apply reciprocal, albeit transformative, formats to service-learning. Thus, even if successful, reciprocal models of service can anticipate possible resistance from students, parents, and administrators alike.

### Notes

This research was part of the first author's dissertation at DePaul University. The first author would like to thank Edgar Ramirez, M.A., for dreaming up and faithfully implementing Intercambio, Laurie Worrall, Ph.D., and The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning for their broad support of service-learning, and most importantly, the University students and Latino community members who participated in the class and interviews. Without their dedication and honesty, this research would not have been possible.

<sup>1</sup> Even the current community-driven project was funded with an eye on university students' outcomes, rather than the community member's experience.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the confidentiality of participants.

<sup>3</sup> Qualitative data were also collected on the university students, which we plan to present in another manuscript.

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