

Building Effective Community-University Partnerships: Are Universities Truly Ready?

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Community service learning and community-based research necessitate the development of strong community-university partnerships. In this paper, students, faculty, and a community partner critically reflect upon the process of establishing a long-term community-university partnership through the integration of a community service learning component into a doctoral program in Community Psychology, thereby offering graduate students the opportunity to engage in long-term community-based research. This reflection reveals the importance of assessing university readiness at the pre-partnership stage, and of ensuring that academics and their institutions are not only willing, but also able, to engage in effective community research partnerships. The authors propose a practical framework for considering university readiness in the form of a series of questions that allows faculty, programs, or institutions considering partnership with a community group to reflect upon their own collaboration readiness.

Universities and funders have become progressively more interested in knowledge transfer and the links between universities, democracy, and civic engagement (Ostrander, 2004). This interest has led to an increase in community service learning (CSL) programs that ground academia in ‘real-world’ knowledge and actively contribute to the improvement of local and national social conditions (Ostrander, 2004). There has also been an increase in community-based research (CBR) (e.g., Israel, Schultz, Parker, Becker, Allen, & Guzman, 2003). As early as 2003, Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, and Donohue predicted that combining CBR and CSL would be the “next important stage of service-learning and engaged scholarship” (p. 6), asserting that there is value in extending CSL models to include CBR approaches.

In this article we describe a Community Psychology doctoral level course that students complete over a period of three years and that involves them in a CBR partnership with a local anti-poverty organization. In the current paper, we are concerned with the formation of the community-university research partnership rather than the findings of the CBR project itself, which will be reported elsewhere.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature on university and institutional readiness when partnering with community organizations for CBR. Using our doctoral level course as an example, we describe the challenges and key learnings in the early

stages of developing a community-university partnership and propose methods of addressing the challenges. In particular, this paper is attempting to move beyond general discussions about institutionalization—described by Furco and Holland (2004) as the intentional incorporation of CSL throughout the institution—to assessing readiness for collaboration. We begin with a brief overview of the literature on community-university research partnerships as linked to CSL and CBR. We then describe the context of the current educational initiative in terms of the disciplinary and institutional environment, the early stages of partner identification and partnership formation, and the team research experience in community-engaged, collaborative research on poverty reduction. We end the article identifying key learnings about partnership readiness and a framework for assessing university readiness at three levels: contextual, between-group, and within-group.

Background

Community Service Learning

Community service learning is defined by the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning as “an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities” (2006, p. 1). In effective CSL initiatives, members of educational institutions and community organizations

work together toward mutually beneficial outcomes. While other forms of community-based learning often passively link students to the community in a classic charity model, CSL has become a vehicle to promote genuine, collaborative, community engagement benefitting students, faculty, and community. For example, Boyer (1996) envisions CSL as a vehicle for "...connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers and to our cities..." (p. 21). Marullo and Edwards (2000) promote a social justice approach to critical education and community-engaged scholarship, and envision transforming university operations in such a way as to allow students and faculty to function as change agents in the community. These contemporary visions of CSL seek to promote learning that addresses social problems at their root causes rather than simply ameliorating their negative impact. Similarly, Strand et al. (2003) suggest that CBR can serve as a vehicle to identify and alter the structural and institutional practices that produce social and economic inequalities. Nyden (2009) further emphasizes the transformative potential of CBR:

... it is not merely a teaching opportunity for students. Collaborative research engages all of the participants involved in knowledge production. In an era where we are seeking to strengthen civic engagement at all levels of society, collaborative research represents a new form of "continuing education" for all. It is a dynamic research process with real outcomes and real consequences to the lives of all involved. (p. 9)

CSL and CBR have similar objectives, both seeking to promote community-university collaboration for the purpose of producing transformational community change. Although the two are not synonymous, CSL is one vehicle that can be used to accomplish CBR.

Community-University Partnerships

To realize the collaborative potential of CSL programs, particularly those involving CBR, functional and sustainable community-university partnerships are essential. For the purpose of this paper, we define community-university partnerships as collaborations between community organizations and institutions of higher learning for the purpose of achieving an identified social change goal through community-engaged scholarship that ensures mutual benefit for the community organization and participating students.

The past several decades have seen a substantial increase in the number of community-university partnerships in North America (e.g., Israel et al., 2003;

Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005; Strand et al., 2003; Trickett & Espino, 2004). Researchers in university settings are increasingly utilizing community-oriented and participatory research approaches such as participatory action research (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), community-based participatory research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003), value-based partnerships (Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivray, 2001), and empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996). These methodological approaches are intended to allow for the equitable inclusion of diverse partners with different skills, understandings, and expertise; enhance the relevance, quality, validity, practicality, and sensitivity of the research; help to dispel community distrust of universities and research; and advance local community goals (Israel et al.). To achieve these outcomes, it is essential to have structures for collaboration that allow university and community partners to work together effectively.

Collaboration Readiness

There is general consensus that successful community-university collaborations are hard work and frequently messy (Nelson et al., 2001; Provan et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2003; Wallerstein, Polascek, & Maltrud, 2002; Wandersman, Goodman, & Butterfoss, 2005). Such collaborations tend to bring together people with different personal styles as well as diverse cultural and social locations, often resulting in conflict. As a consequence, much of the literature on community-oriented and participatory forms of research addresses issues related to working successfully in existing collaborations and much attention is paid to group dynamics and stages of collaborative work. However, in the context of developing collaborations there is a gap in the literature addressing organizational readiness.

For example, the many editions of Johnson and Johnson's (2009) crucial book on group dynamics, referenced by many authors writing on community-based and participatory research partnerships (including Israel et al., 2003; Schulz, Israel, & Lantz, 2003; Wallerstein, Oetzel, Duran, Tafoya, Belone, & Rae, 2008), falls short of assessing the collaboration readiness of potential group members. Similarly, the partnership development model proposed by Nelson, Amio, Prilleltensky, and Nickels (2000) in community psychology starts at *creating the partnership*, assuming that any steps needing to ensure readiness on the part of the university and community partners to engage in collaborative work have already taken place. Models put forward in areas including CSL (e.g., Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, *n.d.*; Furco & Holland (2004); Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Braun, & Mikkelsen (2005); Holland, 1997),

CBR (Baker & Motton, 2008; Gelmon et al., 2005; Israel et al.) and health psychology (Altman, 1995) tend to focus on organizational commitment to the partnerships from the perspective of long-term sustainability but also fall short of addressing partnership readiness. Of course, looking at readiness is only the first step in a process. An examination of readiness will ideally be followed by attention to group dynamics (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 2009), creating the partnerships (e.g., Nelson et al., 2000), and eventually institutionalizing CSL and CBR (e.g., Holland, 1997).

In those few cases where collaboration readiness is discussed in the literature on community-university partnerships, the focus is placed on the community partner. For example, the guide developed by Green et al. (1995) for assessing the extent to which a project aligns with participatory research principles asks researchers to consider, among other things, the extent to which community members exhibit concern about an issue and the extent to which they are prepared to contribute physical or mental resources to the research process. Similarly, the recent guidelines for community-university research partnerships developed by Yale University's Center for Clinical Investigation (2009) largely focus on how to ensure that the community is ready to partner and engage in all stages of the research. Only 2 points out of 10 address the university's own readiness and pre-partnership issues—these state that the university should be familiar with important community issues and potential partners and have liability insurance to cover research participants and partners. It seems to be taken for granted that the university system is largely ready and able to engage in the early stages of collaboration with community groups.

It is our assertion that we cannot automatically assume that universities are ready and able to engage in meaningful partnership with community organizations. We see the dearth of literature addressing university readiness for community-university partnerships as a critical gap that must be filled. We believe that further attention needs to be paid to the conceptualization and operationalization of university readiness: what structures or features must exist in an organization prior to collaboration to allow that group to be an effective member of a collaborative partnership? While we recognize the relationship between readiness for collaboration (micro-level) and institutionalization (macro-level), the aim of this paper is to focus on the former.

Educational Setting

The doctoral program discussed in this article is housed in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. WLU provides a positive climate

for the development of CSL research programs due to its commitment to “enriching the lives of those in both local and global communities ... [and] the application of research-grounded policies and practices to society's most pressing problems” (Wilfrid Laurier University Academic Plan, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, WLU has an office of Community Service Learning, a Centre for Community Research Learning and Action (CCRLA), and a strong Community Psychology program with more than thirty years of experience in community engaged learning through the practicum component at the master's level. However, during the first six years of the newer Community Psychology doctoral program, no practical or CSL component had been required.

Community Psychology

Community Psychology as a discipline is well placed to take leadership in CSL research initiatives. Community Psychology—a sub-discipline of psychology—strives to promote egalitarian collaborations between academics, communities, and citizens with a focus on transformative social change (Angelique & Culley, 2007; Trickett & Espino, 2004), and values such as self-determination, participation, caring and compassion, human diversity, and social justice play a significant role (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). The major emphases of the particular program at WLU are a values-based framework of systems-level analysis of issues, a critical analysis of power and oppression, and a focus on social change actions (Nelson, Lavoie, & Mitchell, 2007). The establishment of the doctoral program in Community Psychology at WLU provided an opportunity to implement an innovative course with the goals of uniting CSL and CBR opportunities and creating a long-term community-university research partnership with the potential of producing transformative change on local issues of importance.

Community Research and Action Course

In fall 2007, a three-year (six-semester) required course called Community Research and Action (CRA) for doctoral students in community psychology at WLU was revised to become a CSL course. The inclusion of CSL is in line with community psychology graduate programs worldwide, the majority of which require some type of service, internship community practicum involving up to 900 hours of community engagement (Gatlin, Rushenberg, & Hazel, 2009). In keeping with the values, methodological approaches, and practice foci of the discipline of community psychology, the revised course includes approximately 100 hours per year (300 hours total over a three-year period for each doctoral student—still fewer than many Community Psychology doctoral programs

require) of community engagement, in which students work over the three-year period on a team research project conducted in partnership with a local community organization. The unique three-year cross-cohort course model supports continuity of community relationships and longer-term research projects, as each year, second- and third-year students orient and mentor the new cohort of incoming students. The model is envisioned to support a long-term (up to 10 years) commitment to a single community partner organization, with the potential for multiple research projects to occur within that time frame.

In September 2007, six students and two faculty members, in consultation with the university's Centre for Community Service Learning, began a process of identifying potential community partners. Selection criteria included congruence with the discipline of community psychology in terms of organizational values (e.g., social justice) and target community (e.g., marginalized communities); positivity toward research; a transformative versus an ameliorative focus; a champion for CSL within the organization; and organizational stability. In November 2007, the students and faculty completed a scan of local community organizations based on these criteria and conducted interviews with three potential community organization partners. In December 2007, *Opportunities Waterloo Region* (hereafter referred to as *Opportunities*) agreed to become the program's community partner. *Opportunities* (www.owr.ca) is dedicated to poverty prevention and reduction in Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada, and its work takes place at multiple levels, including interventions directed at assisting individuals as well as those directed toward changing policies and systems.

Beginning in early 2008, students, faculty, and *Opportunities* staff began work on the partnership's first CSL project, a policy analysis study (the Poverty Policy Project) designed to review and analyze the impact of government policies on people living in poverty. More specifically, the project examines the systemic (policy) barriers to social inclusion experienced by people living in poverty in Waterloo Region and seeks to develop policy recommendations to address pressing poverty issues. Work on this project continues at the time of writing this article.

Method

Purpose

While the CSL project involved a formal research proposal and ethics review, this paper does not provide an analysis of the research project itself. Rather, the current paper offers retrospective reflections on the formative stages of this innovative graduate level CSL initiative that began at the beginning of the third

year of the revised CRA course. These retrospective reflections were initiated as an informal self-evaluation designed to focus on the processes of course implementation and partnership development. The reflective process had two main purposes. The first was to identify what was working well and areas for improvement in both the course and the partnership, thus allowing for adaptation and improvement in these areas. The second purpose was to document and disseminate key learnings from the course implementation and partnership development processes, thus sharing our experiences and insights with faculties and departments considering incorporating CSL into doctoral-level programs.

The Reflective Process

Representatives from both the university and the community partner organization participated in the reflective process. The faculty member who designed the CRA, two students with multiple years of involvement in the course, and the Executive Director of *Opportunities* provided leadership on the process reflections and document analysis that comprised our self-evaluative process. Input was also sought from other partnership participants including past students, *Opportunities* stakeholders involved in or aware of the CSL project, other Community Psychology faculty members, and the Director of WLU's Centre for Community Service Learning, through focused dialogue and solicited written comments. Archival text materials related to the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership, including course notes, minutes from meetings with the community partner, and research plans and timelines related to the policy analysis project were systematically reviewed and coded to identify themes and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The texts enabled us to review the developmental stages of the partnership, the timeline of events, and the specifics of the processes and decision making, which were used to contextualize the reflections provided by participants in the reflection sessions.

Analysis

Seeking to understand and unpack our partnership experience in a theoretical as well as informal manner, we used Hall et al.'s (2008) description of collaborative readiness factors in transdisciplinary research teams as the initial data analysis lens. This framework distinguishes among three categories of factors related to collaboration readiness—contextual conditions, described as including institutional resources and supports or barriers to collaboration; intrapersonal characteristics of team members, such as research orientation, communication style, and leadership qualities; and interpersonal factors, such as group size and participants' histories of collaboration. Data from the

written sources, course notes, meeting minutes, research timelines, informal dialogues, and reflective notes were coded into inductive categories within this framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as well as grouped to represent the perspectives of the different stakeholders—faculty, students, and the community partner. In each category, specific themes were identified that were relevant to the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership. Reflections from team members around themes and issues provided greater context and descriptive depth to the basic framework depicted by the archived written materials.

Through the analysis, we recognized that, to more fully understand the dynamics of the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership, it was necessary to move beyond the categories set forth in the Hall et al. (2008) model. A major reason for this was the fact that the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership was a collaborative effort between groups, rather than simply among individuals. While retaining the notion of contextual factors as described by Hall et al., the analysis presented here describes two other key groups of factors impacting the success of this CSL initiative. The first of these is between-group factors related to the interaction of the CRA course group with the *Opportunities* team. The second is within-group factors that deal with the relationships and dynamics inside the CRA group itself. While community organizations also have internal dynamics that can influence the success of a community-university partnership, within-group dynamics of the *Opportunities* team did not emerge from this reflective process as having significantly impacted the partnership development process. This may be because the readiness of the community partner had been assessed prior to issuing an invitation to partnership, using the selection criteria described above, whereas the readiness of the university had not been similarly assessed.

Findings

The results of our retrospective reflections and process of self-evaluation brought forth a number of questions that our team wished had been asked either prior to embarking on a community-university partnership or in the early stages of partnership negotiation. The first group of questions deals with contextual factors, related to the institutional system of the university and its ability and readiness to support a community-university research partnership. The second set of questions is about between-group factors, related to the relationship between the *Opportunities* and CRA teams—questions on which our groups should have reached consensus during the early stages of partnership development. The third set of questions is related to the internal dynamics of the CRA team, which we refer to as within-group fac-

tors, which we believe needed to have been addressed by this group as part of the preparation for engaging in partnership with a community group. Here, the findings of our retrospective process reflections and document review are organized to present the questions that we believe should have been asked in each of these three categories, along with our experiences, learnings, and challenges related to each of the identified factors.

Contextual Factors

Our collective retrospective reflections provided key experiential learnings. We identified challenges that were particularly noted in three key areas related to the university context: institutional commitment, resources, and infrastructure for research management.

Is the necessary commitment present at the level of the institution, the department, and individual faculty members? Community-engaged scholarship requires high levels of commitment not only by individual students and faculty, but also at the level of institutional systems. A key challenge to implementing the CRA was the need for approval by a multi-layer process including both departmental and higher administrative channels. Early in the planning stages, two needs were identified to ensure continuity and sustainability of the CRA: (a) The commitment of a small group of faculty members to the project to ensure continuity of communication and vision in what was intended to be a long-term commitment to a community partner, and (b) the necessity to recognize the CRA as a labor-intensive course when determining faculty teaching loads.

The faculty member who designed CRA was highly enthusiastic, and worked to motivate students to begin working toward partnership recruitment and the incorporation of the CSL component prior to the completion of the lengthy approval process. The move to implementation prior to receiving approval created significant challenges during the initial stages of partnership development. The CRA group, while conveying to potential partners their desire for a multi-year partnership that would overcome some of the difficulties of traditional short-term CSL, also had to be careful not to build community partners' expectations beyond a level of commitment that ultimately might not receive approval from the university.

Another challenge created by moving forward to implementation so quickly was the fact that not all faculty members had fully bought into the idea of a long-term CSL commitment for the Community Psychology program. Even among faculty who were supportive in principle, most were unwilling to express a willingness to teach the course in subsequent years unless issues related to course weight and

teaching load were resolved to their satisfaction.

Are the necessary funding, space, and other resources available? The availability of appropriate resources, including funding and space, needs to be considered prior to embarking upon a community-university partnership. WLU's Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action allowed the CRA-*Opportunities* team to use their space for group meetings. However, no financial resources were allocated to the partnership by either the department or the University, and no external grants had been sought prior to partnership development. When research began, therefore, the team had to struggle with issues including compensation for research participants and funding for interview and focus group transcription. These issues were temporarily resolved through several means: transcription was added to student team members' duties, the community partner organization was able to apply for a small grant to cover compensation to research participants, and one sympathetic faculty member was able to apply some of his own funding resources to the project. All of these are acknowledged as short-term fixes that are not sustainable in the long run.

Is suitable infrastructure in place for data management and storage? University systems for data management and storage may not always be familiar or accessible to community partners. The CRA-*Opportunities* group experienced a number of challenges in managing and storing research data in a way that was accessible to all members of the research team. Limitations in the amount of electronic storage space available through the University made it impossible to set up a file-sharing system on the University server. Some early efforts were made to use a Wiki to enable data sharing; however, members of the research team had widely differing levels of technological literacy, and not all were comfortable using this technology. Currently, data are maintained in computer systems and hard files located at the University; this set-up means that *Opportunities* staff members involved in the research cannot directly access the data without going through a member of the CRA group.

Between-Group Factors

Between-group factors are related to relationships between the partnering organizations—*Opportunities* and the CRA group. Factors related to the internal dynamics of the CRA team are referred to as within-group factors, and will be discussed in the section that follows. Many of the same issues were relevant at both the between-group and within-group levels; however, they manifested in different ways. Between-group factors relevant during the formative stage of the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership had to do with congruence in vision and values, communi-

cation, power-sharing, and collaborative practices.

Is there congruence in partner vision and values? It is important for university and community partners to arrive at a shared understanding of one another's wants, needs, and values. Both university and community partners identified the strong congruence of vision and values as a key strength of the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership. *Opportunities*, with its mission of poverty reduction and prevention through addressing root causes, and its additional commitment to ensuring that low-income people have a voice in issues that affect them, was a natural fit with Community Psychology's commitment to social justice and addressing the root causes of societal problems. Soon after the two groups agreed to partner, additional steps were taken to ensure that the CRA and *Opportunities* groups were "speaking the same language" with regard to the partnership. The *Opportunities* Director was invited to make a presentation at the University about the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, the model of understanding poverty and poverty reduction that guides the organization's work. The CRA students, in turn, mapped out the key features of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as they related to the mission and values of Community Psychology, sharing this with *Opportunities* staff, so that team members could gain familiarity with the disciplinary terminology of each organization and come to understand how their perspectives could complement one another.

How will we communicate with one another? Good communication is an essential component of any team project. It became clear early in the research partnership that the volume of communication related to the Poverty Policy Project was too great to have everyone involved copied on every e-mail. The first attempt to streamline communication took the form of one person, at the time a second-year PhD student, assigned to act as the liaison between the two groups. However, this did not prove effective for several reasons. Representatives of the community partner organization often continued to direct communication to whomever they thought needed to receive it—this meant that messages were sometimes passed to the assigned liaison student, sometimes to the course professor, and sometimes to the entire group. The liaison student experienced frustration as she was not always certain what communication had taken place, which impeded her fulfilling her assigned function effectively. She also experienced concern as, at times, she was privy to information (such as knowing that the long-term nature of the prospective CSL project was the subject of concern in the course approval process) that she felt the community partner should know, but did not feel that it was within her rights to share. Currently,

the course professor acts as the main point of liaison between the two teams, which has proven more comfortable for both students and the community partner.

How will we ensure equitable power-sharing? Power differentials must be considered in community-university partnerships. From the outset, the Community Psychology program was in a position of relative power vis-à-vis community groups, as it was the CRA group that first set criteria for potential community partners, then evaluated organizations based on those criteria, and finally extended an offer of partnership to *Opportunities*. Once the partnership had been established, attempts were made to reduce the power disparities. For example, *Opportunities* staff were asked to propose the research projects that would be of most benefit to them in their work, and the CRA team then shared information about their research strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis each of the proposed projects so that the two groups could make an informed decision together. When poverty policy was chosen as the focus for the first collaborative research project, the CRA team asked *Opportunities* whether ALIV(e) (Awareness of Low-Income Voices, a low-income self-advocacy group facilitated by *Opportunities*) could be asked to serve as an advisory group for the research. The Executive Director of *Opportunities* has reflected that it was a pleasant surprise to realize that the CRA team wanted to go beyond liaising with *Opportunities* staff to ensure that individuals with lived experience of poverty had an active role in designing the research project.

What will collaboration look like for our groups? Hall et al. (2008) have noted that team members' previous experiences working in collaboration are centrally related to collaboration readiness. The CRA team consisted of the course professor and between four and six enrolled students, depending upon the year. The *Opportunities* team consisted of the Executive Director and, at various times during the partnership, one or more of the following—ALIV(e) members, a Project Support Coordinator, and two Research Assistants (both Social Work practicum students from another local university). *Opportunities* had a rich background in collaborative work and experiences working in partnership with organizations including local government, other non-profit agencies, and low-income resident groups. There was also some history of collaboration between *Opportunities* and members of the university community, and so the new CSL partnership began with some level of trust already established. Both groups were aware, however, that in the early stages of partnership time would need to be devoted to building trust and establishing productive ways of working together. Given the busy schedules of students, faculty, and community organization staff, simply finding

the time to come together around the same table presented a challenge at times. The *Opportunities*' Director has reflected on feeling a sense of relief when she and her staff felt that the partnership had achieved a level of solidity and trust that allowed them to feel as though the project would remain on-track without the extensive levels of personal contact characterizing the early stages of teamwork.

The CRA group entered into the CSL partnership with the hope and intent of acting as a full collaborator with *Opportunities*—the goal was that the two groups would learn from one another by engaging in all tasks as a community-university team. However, in reflection, the CRA group's role to date has been more that of a consultant. While this role has allowed the CRA group to assist in meeting *Opportunities*' research needs, it is less ideal in allowing for learning and skills transfer. While the ideal would be to allow students to learn from *Opportunities* about the practical side of working in poverty reduction, and for representatives of *Opportunities* to be trained in research methods and other skills that could be applied to future projects, in practice there has been a tendency to divide the workload so that each group is working in the areas where it is already strong and capable. In reflection, while this division has allowed us to move more quickly toward the completion of the initial research project, it has done so at the expense of some of our goals around student and community partner training and development. Steps being taken to attempt to improve skill-building have included the development of individual learning goals by each student in the CRA, and the invitation to *Opportunities* team members also to set learning goals and attend University and departmental events that will help them to achieve those goals.

Within-Group Factors

Within-group factors are related to the internal dynamics of the CRA team during the formative stages of the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership. The reflective process and document analysis identified individual resistance, power-sharing, and turnover of group members as particularly important for consideration.

What do we do if there is resistance from students and/or faculty? Even in cases where team members agree in principle regarding the importance of community-engaged scholarship, it can be difficult to put these values into practice in a university setting. When considering a community-university partnership, it is necessary to consider what steps will be taken in case of resistance by students and/or faculty. At the planning stages of the CRA, students expressed significant reservations to the introduction of an intensive CSL component into the doctoral pro-

gram. Students noted that the addition of a collaborative research project would add significantly to their workloads, adversely affect their personal research projects, and potentially cause a decline in on-time graduation rates. More than half of the students taking the course during the first year it was implemented commuted to the University, thereby interfering with their ability to devote significant time to work in the Waterloo community.

With discussion, the students agreed to work toward the new model. However, particularly during the first two years of the course's implementation (during which time students who had entered the program without the expectation of a CSL component were involved), resistance to the increased workload and responsibility continued to occur. This was compounded by the fact that, as mentioned earlier, the decision to implement the course prior to full approval through University channels had resulted in certain faculty members withholding buy-in until the new course was fully formalized. Knowing that the faculty and department were less than fully committed to the course compromised students' investment in the collaborative research project.

Another area of some student resistance has been around the nature of the research project itself. *Opportunities'* mandate of poverty reduction and prevention was identified as an area of interest by the first group of CRA students. However, as new students rotate into the program annually, it was inevitable that not everyone would share a passion for this area. This issue has been, thus far, dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, students and faculty were able to work together to find a way in which the project could meet the students' individual training needs; while in others, students have negotiated individual learning deliverables outside the group project. While both of these solutions have their benefits and may be appropriate in particular situations, the second does have the unfortunate effect of reducing the size and efficacy of the already-small research team.

How will we share power, responsibility, and authority? In addition to considering the power differential between the community and university partners, our reflective process and document analysis found that there can be challenges related to power, responsibility, and authority among members of the student group. The CRA was set up with the intent to utilize a peer leadership model in which students in their third year in the course served as leaders for the student group. However, this model became problematic on multiple occasions. The combination of high levels of student resistance, the demands of balancing an intensive CSL course with other program requirements, and the fact that the CRA course was

marked on a pass-fail basis meant that at times student deliverables for the research team were late or of poor quality. This led to a not insignificant amount of conflict between students. Some students experienced feelings of resentment, or perceived others as "not pulling their weight." Students who were local residents and had working relationships in the Waterloo community feared that their reputations in the community would be damaged if work produced by the team was of poor quality or not meeting agreed-upon timelines. The students who were given the responsibility of team leadership perceived themselves as having accountability for team deliverables without having the accompanying authority necessary to ensure that outputs were met.

How will we ensure continuity as students and faculty turn over? In a long-term community-university partnership, some turnover of team members is inevitable. It is necessary to consider how new students will be oriented to the research team and to ensure continuity of vision among faculty members.

In the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership, each year, as some students complete their third year of CRA and new students are enrolled into the program, there is some degree of re-orientation. However, the fact that only one-third of involved students rotate in or out in any given year has proven to be a strength of the approach, as more senior students can then mentor and orient their new teammates.

Faculty turnover has proved to be a bit more challenging. To date, only two faculty have taught the course since the adoption of the CSL component, one of whom is the faculty member who prompted the effort to re-design the CRA course. During this individual's sabbatical year, the course was taught by a first-year faculty member who, despite extensive experience in community-based research, lacked both background with the prior model of the course and familiarity with the challenges previously experienced around resources, infrastructure, readiness, and institutional supports. This lack of continuity was frustrating for the faculty member, students, and community partner.

An additional challenge arose when the course instructor experienced health challenges and was absent for several months. Because the course was viewed as being student-led, as described above, no substitute instructor was assigned to cover the course during the faculty member's period of medical leave. This created an even heavier burden on the students, particularly on the student leaders, as well as frustrations for the community partner.

Discussion

Our findings support the literature that states that community-university partnerships necessitate com-

plex, time-consuming, and often messy processes (Nelson et al., 2001; Provan et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2003; Wallerstein et al., 2002; Wandersman et al., 2005). Universities engaging in community-university partnerships for CBR, CSL, or both, therefore can benefit from a realistic consideration of university readiness prior to the formation of these partnerships (as well as during later stages when considering institutionalization of either CSL or CBR). In particular, we have noted the importance of pre-assessment of university readiness in terms of mission/purpose, values, infrastructure, resources, and communication within the affected learning environment and between course participants and community partners.

Based on the lessons learned from our retrospective reflections on the developmental process of this innovative, doctoral level, CSL model, we propose an initial set of questions we believe are imperative for universities to consider prior to and during the formative stages of community-university partnerships. We propose that institutions of higher learning preparing to engage in collaborative efforts with community partners that move beyond short term models of CSL ask themselves the collaboration readiness questions presented in Table 1. These questions encourage consideration of the contextual,

between-group, and within-group factors that emerged as critical elements to building an effective, sustainable community-university partnership.

Although we suggest that the collaboration readiness questions in Table 1 will assess the readiness of universities to form effective partnerships with community organizations, we do not intend this tool to be used to determine a dichotomous outcome of readiness vs. non-readiness. We recognize that neither universities nor our community partners are static entities, and therefore suggest considering collaboration readiness as a continuum. It is important to engage in self-assessment not only prior to partnership formation, but also throughout the partnership—as we did in our reflection on the early stages of the CRA-*Opportunities* partnership. Our experience also shows that the presence of strong advocates for community-university partnerships in both organizations allowed us to move forward with a successful partnership even though not all readiness factors were in place. Imperfect readiness is likely the case for most universities and community partners. In this case, the presented questions may be used as a guide to prepare both university and community members for issues that might arise throughout the partnership.

While university missions and research funders are

Table 1
Collaboration Readiness Questions for Universities and Academics

Contextual Factors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the current university commitment to community-engaged scholarship? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. University – Does the university mission have a focus on community? How is community-engaged scholarship recognized in promotion and tenure processes? Are appropriate vehicles for risk management in place? b. Department – Is a commitment to community-engaged scholarship central or peripheral to curriculum development and faculty time allocation? c. Individual faculty members – What is the level of commitment individual faculty members have to community engagement? Do faculty teaching the associated courses have the appropriate pedagogical background? 2. What type of resources are available for partnership formation and for the work of the partnership? Has appropriate attention been paid to financial, space, and human resources? 3. What type of data management infrastructure is in place? Does the data management infrastructure facilitate or impede the full participation of community partners in the research?
Between-Group Factors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there congruent visions and values between the university and community partners? Is there a common language, or do you need to work to develop a common understanding and language? 2. Have you identified communication processes appropriate to all partners? 3. Do you have appropriate mechanisms for sharing power, responsibility, and authority with a community partner? What benefits will the community partner realize from the partnership? 4. What will collaboration look like for your groups? Is there trust and mutual respect between the partners? Is there a clear understanding of the resources and constraints that each partner brings to the table? Is a Memorandum of Understanding in place? How will the success of the partnership be evaluated?
Within-Group Factors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How will you address resistance for community-engaged practice among students and faculty? 2. What mechanisms are in place for sharing power, responsibility, and authority among students? 3. How will you manage continuity of the partnership and the research project as students and faculty change? What is the anticipated level of turnover, and what effect might this have on the partnership?

increasingly advancing in their understanding of the importance of community-university partnerships, it is our experience that the university culture has not yet shifted to realistically accommodate new research methods and learning environments that involve sustained community engagement. Assessing and improving university readiness is thus essential to the development of strong community-university partnerships. Universities need to make a strong commitment to community-engaged scholarship and research, not only in their mission statements, but in their practices related to curriculum development, faculty time allocation, tenure and merit review, infrastructure development, and resource allocation. With clear institutional commitments and a shift in university culture, it will be more feasible for pre-tenured faculty to be active in community-engaged research and learning and for students to commit themselves to the demands of practice-based doctoral studies.

Community Partner Reflection

Throughout the findings and discussion above, we have incorporated the viewpoints and insights of both university and community partners in our effort to integrate a CSL component and a long-term community partnership into Wilfrid Laurier University's Community Psychology doctoral program. We also would like to offer the following paragraphs, in which *Opportunities'* Director reflects upon her experience and that of her organization in engaging in this endeavor, and offers her advice to other community organizations as they embark upon partnerships with institutions of higher education:

As stated in the 'Discussion' section, it is important for community partners to question the university's readiness. Potential community organizations may not have previous experience working in partnership with a university research team; even if they do, they still may not know what an effective partnership looks like. To assist community organizations in knowing what to look for in an effective and collaborative community-university relationship, they should review information on existing best practices for this type of collaboration prior to interviewing the university partner. We need to ask ourselves what we need as an agency from a community-university partnership, and to be clear about what we expect from our university partners to allow us to create and achieve common goals.

Engaging in the partnership review described in this article also allowed *Opportunities* to reflect upon its own readiness for partnership. It is necessary for community and university partners to share common values and a commitment to the community service learning project. Time is also a huge factor. My biggest wish is that I had been able to have a perma-

nent staff person with a strong research background to provide consistency from *Opportunities'* side in the research component of the project. I believe that there is a place for future research to develop a set of questions paralleling the ones presented here that will allow community organizations to similarly assess their own readiness for partnering with universities.

In our collaboration, we were embarking on a journey that was new to both groups. It was made clear from the beginning that this long-term partnership was the first of its kind. It is important for partners to remember throughout the journey that the newly created relationship is an 'experiment'; this necessitates keeping realistic expectations along with a willingness to enter into new, unexplored territory.

An important aspect of this relationship was the level of respect and consideration displayed by the university team. No matter what challenges they faced internally, they were always considerate of their community partner.

It was refreshing to be part of a university partnership endeavoring to join in community and meet community partners halfway. Universities, after all, are a part of community.

Conclusion

Research-based CSL requires sound and sustainable community-university partnerships. Ensuring collaboration readiness is therefore an important process of assessment and preparation that needs to take place prior to embarking on a collaborative CSL journey with community partners. The framework proposed here, first and foremost, is intended to provide universities with an initial set of questions for the purpose of assessing readiness to embark on a community-based participatory research project, establish a CSL component at the doctoral level, or both. Historically, many communities have had negative experiences in partnering with universities for research purposes (Elias & O'Neil, 2001; Mitchell & Baker, 2005). As a result, universities have to be mindful of the possible impact on the community of poorly conceived and badly executed partnerships. Community-university partnerships that move beyond the rhetoric of collaboration require universities to shift the university culture to (a) value community knowledge and share power with community stakeholders and (b) value and support faculty and student time, labor, and the outputs of community-engaged scholarship.

Community-university collaborations are viewed as a critical tool for addressing pressing social problems (Boyer, 1996) with important transformative potential to advance social change by focusing university resources on real world issues in local communities (Nyden, 2009). However, given the static culture of universities and the longstanding tradition of indepen-

dent scholarship, it is important to ask whether universities are truly ready to contribute appropriately to initiatives that move away from a short-term charity model of community service to fulfill the potential of long-term social justice initiatives through community research collaborations (Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Ostrander, 2004). We propose that the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of community-university collaborations will be enhanced by engaging in pre-partnership assessments of university readiness. The development of a university readiness assessment tool contributes to increased awareness and accountability of university partners. An assessment tool also assists in redressing the balance of power in community-university partnerships by placing the assessment tool in the hands of community collaborators to assess the fit of potential university partners.

Note

The authors would like to thank the following individuals who have contributed to the development of this paper: Dr. Kate Connolly, Director, Laurier Centre for Community Service Learning; Jacqueline de Schutter and Rich Janzen, Ph.D. students, Community Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University; and Dr. Robb Travers, Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University.

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