

***ENHANCING VALUE FOR NONPROFIT COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING INITIATIVES***

Wendy L. MacDonald, MA
Grant MacEwan College
Edmonton, AB Canada

May 2009

ABSTRACT

Campus–community partnerships provide diverse experiential learning opportunities, often undertaken through student placements in community-based nonprofit organizations. These partnerships, which include service-learning, are perceived as a pedagogically valuable approach to student learning. Universities and colleges, as well as nonprofit organizations and the wider community, potentially gain value from the relationships. These collaborations must be mutually beneficial to be sustained and developed. As demand for community-engaged learning placements grows, and the capacity of nonprofit organization partners to integrate students is challenged, disproportionate costs and benefits may threaten the sustainability of these partnerships, without enhanced collaboration efforts. Through qualitative action research, involving narrative inquiry, the research examines what factors build and consume the capacity of nonprofit organizations during their involvement in community-engaged learning initiatives involving student placements. Opportunities to build meaningful reciprocal relationships, create social capital, develop human resources, contribute to learning, and support transformational change were viewed as factors contributing value to nonprofit partners.

Research Approach and Participants

Eight nonprofit human service organizations in Edmonton, Canada participated in the research, represented by Executive Directors, Managers of Volunteer Services, Program Managers, and Human Resource Managers. Annual organizational budgets of participants range from \$550,000.00 to \$13,500,000.00 and the organizations employ eight to 400 individuals. They involve 75 to 2000 volunteers each year. Each organization placed 5 to 40 College and University students in formal community engaged learning experiences in the previous year and responded to many other requests from students and Faculty. Organizations participating in the research inquiry host college and university students from many areas of study. These include, but are not limited to nursing, social work, speech pathology, child and youth care, early childhood education, volunteer management, disability studies, commerce, education, theology, office administration, physical, recreational and occupational therapy, psychology, sociology, business management, communications, recreation and leisure studies, public relations, marketing, information technology, and fine arts. Within these disciplines, students can be further segmented by education level, ranging from new undergraduates to doctoral candidates. They can also be classified by the type of activity they participate in. These include research, service delivery and infrastructure building. This inquiry focused on the latter two.

Within this inquiry, community-engaged learning included practicums, field placements, service learning, and other forms of experiential learning activity situated in community organizations and used for earning credit in higher education programs.

Requests for student placements were largely from Edmonton region public colleges and universities, although half of the organizations had hosted students from rural areas, from smaller municipalities, from institutions in adjacent provinces, and occasionally from other countries. Students travelled from other localities because of the unique missions of specific Edmonton organizations, or because their own community could not provide an urban context for study.

The research question studied in this project was “What factors add value to the experience of community-based nonprofit organizations involved in student placements related to community-engaged learning? The sub-questions were:

1. What do nonprofit community partners value in their community-engaged learning involvement with College and University student placements?
2. What challenges de-value the potential benefits of these community-engaged learning partnerships to nonprofit community partners?
3. What factors contribute to capacity building through community-engaged learning partnerships for the nonprofit community partners?

An action research approach was used to examine the factors that build and consume organizational capacity in the nonprofit agencies as a result of student involvement in community-engaged learning activities. Research participants were interviewed individually followed by a focus group. Narrative inquiry, combined with semi-structured interviews, was utilized. Metastories were used to connect, integrate and report the experiences of organizations. While the composite narrative reflects the range and diversity of experiences described by research participants, it is not universal in its elements. The shared experiences of research participants were generally consistent; however, situational factors also influenced their perspectives. The research participants

described the benefits of campus–community partnerships and the barriers and challenges in these relationships that reduce value to their organizations. Finally they identified their hopes for the future and the related change required for sustaining meaningful student placements and developing the full potential of community-engaged learning.

Contextual Issues Influencing Community-Engaged Learning Placements

While not the focus of this inquiry, it is contextually important to note that many participants spoke, at length, about other kinds of community-engaged learning requests received by their agencies that influence their capacity to integrate additional students. The largest group includes students in secondary schools, seeking work placement or service learning experiences related to both mandated and voluntary curricular activity. At the same time, even younger students are often encouraged to connect with community organizations through school, faith, and leisure youth groups. Graff (2006) and Hall et al. (2000) describe significant growth in mandated community service related to education. In addition, five participants noted hosting adult learners in training and employment programs operated by other nonprofit organizations. Several organizations also support mandated community service placements linked to the justice system. Coupled with significant volunteer involvement reported by research participants, all forms of community-service and nonprofit workplace learning combined place a significant load on community-based partners. This is congruent with the conclusions of Graff (2006). While no single activity created undue stress on the community organizations; the cumulative effect of growth in popularity of these activities is significant.

Enos and Morton (2003) describe five levels of student involvement, sometimes incremental, which influence both investment and outcomes. These are one-time events and projects, short-term placements, ongoing placements that involve mutual dependence, core partnerships based on interdependence, and finally, transformation through joint creation of work and knowledge. Each carries with it both strengths and challenges to the partners, individually and collectively.

According to the research participants, the current infrastructure capacity and human resources required to effectively integrate students, and benefit from campus involvement, is challenged. While such increases may be interpreted as a positive element of organizational capacity building (Floyd, 2007; Kibbe et al., 2004; Lashby, 2004), the growth may also consume organizational resources in the process.

The current staffing shortages in non-profit organizations negatively impact the agency's capacity to manage and support the student learning experience. As the human resources crisis continues to erode the nonprofit community organizations, a significant number of opportunities to partner will be lost. (Research Participant)

Existing capacity influences our ability to build more. If we don't have the resources to involve students we just have to pass on the opportunity. (Research Participant)

The participating community organizations support community-engaged learning placements using diverse staffing, processes, and infrastructure approaches. Most participating organizations employ a professional manager of volunteers, who is frequently the first point of contact for requests. One organization employs a Community Liaison Manager, whose role includes volunteer and student engagement, among other responsibilities. Another agency coordinated all student placements through their Human Resources Manager, although students seeking career-related volunteer roles, initiated on

their own, were referred to the Volunteer Manager. Another participant, a Program Manager, noted that program areas were responsible for all student interaction in their organization. Other community agencies are too small to have specialists. Front line program staff, leadership volunteers, or the Executive Director screen, interview, and place the students themselves.

Participants universally noted that they have developed enhanced organizational policies, processes, and infrastructure to support community-engaged learning, in recent years.

We used to have more problems. It was chaotic. We treated every request differently. With more requests we had to develop more structure, more processes. We have clearer criteria, policies and are more likely to say no. We had some negative experiences that lead to us developing a committee that reviews all requests. The committee represents all areas of the organization. It ensures transparency and considers the whole organization not just one program. I think we've improved quality for students and for us. (Research Participant)

All research participants indicated that both they, and their organizations, were highly supportive of student involvement under the right circumstances. Challenges noted were largely related to the degree of investment by students and campus partners in relation to their expectation of outcomes.

There are three kinds of student placements. It's like a continuum. There are those that don't ask a lot, don't give a lot, and don't get a lot, but we all benefit enough that it's OK. There are some that expect a lot, but give a lot, and so get a lot in return. These are great. And then there's those that expect a lot and have unrealistic expectations and don't give a lot. They are the main problem. (Research Participant)

All participants described working in a nonprofit organization, especially in human services, as very challenging. While they all indicated their commitment to the nonprofit sector, they noted significant financial stress and understaffed workplaces with frequent turnover at the front line. Coupled with these conditions, they noted the effort

that many community organizations invest in placing students with little direct or measurable outcome to the nonprofit organization in playing this critical role. The assistance provided to students is often broader community information and referral, nonprofit sector orientation, and encouragement, rather than information specific to their individual agencies. All participants felt ethical responsibility for this assistance in an increasingly complex community and a cautious willingness to provide reasonable support. At the same time, the community partners described a lack of awareness by campus partners, funders, policy makers, and sometimes those in their own organization about this important role and the related capacity it may consume.

The Value of Community-Engaged Learning to Nonprofit Community Partners

The community partners in this research shared the joys and positive outcomes of student involvement in community-engaged learning. They described the attitudes, energy, perspectives, creativity, learning, and curiosity they value in student relationships (Jacoby, 2003). They further recounted the kinds of technical skills and the focus that students can bring to achieving their organization's mission. These outcomes bring personal meaning and satisfaction to staff that support students, increasing the likelihood that they will support future student involvement.

The research participants also summarized some of the indirect value that community-engaged student placements generate for their organization. These included connections to the human, information, and physical resources of colleges and universities. The community partners related that the community-engagement value developed through social networks that may result in longer-term human resource,

information, financial, and adaptive capacity (Blumenthal, 2003; Floyd, 2007; Goldenberg, 2006; Hall et al., 2003). They described the value of bridging social capital (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Putnam, 2000) developed through relationships with students, faculty, and other staff associated with campus partners. The research participants further related the desire to act as learning partners in shaping curriculum and practice. They expressed empathy for the challenges faculty and other campus partners face in facilitating community-engaged learning.

These research findings support the notion that community partners in campus–community learning collaborations identify significant value in, and support of, student placements. This value contributes to several areas of nonprofit organizational capacity development. These are human resource capacity, financial capacity, and structural capacity (Hall et al., 2003).

Structural capacity includes relational and network capacity, planning and development capacity, and infrastructure and process capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Human resources capacity may be defined as the ability to focus staff, volunteers, and other human resources in support of organizational and community goals. The competencies, skills, motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge of individuals and groups are paramount to achieving in all other capacity areas. Financial capacity is the generation and deployment of financial resources. While community-engaged learning may be seen as an expense, it can also be seen as an investment in future funding. Structural capacity includes relational and network capacity and the ability to form and draw on relationships with members, clients, funders, partners, donors, volunteers, regulators, and other stakeholders. These relationships strongly link to the community-engagement benefits

research participants described. Planning and development capacity ranges from policy development through to planning processes that frame the organization's work. These were illustrated by community partners who applauded student research and project management. Finally, infrastructure and process capacity provides for operational resources that include facilities, intellectual property, and other products required to deliver service. This capacity was more likely contributed through faculty and staff or through campus institutional resource sharing, than by direct student involvement, and was seen as less prevalent than desired by research participants. Research participants reported varied levels of capacity development occurring in the relationship; however, the weakest contributions were often those most valued by the community partner.

Partnership Challenges Experienced by Nonprofit Community Organizations

All research participants described challenges encountered with students, with campus faculty and staff, and with other stakeholders, such as policy makers, who influence the value of student placements related to community-engaged learning.

The community partners summarized concerns about the lack of consultation and lead time provided by campuses to accommodate effective planning. This impacts the relative value generated for all stakeholders and increases the resources consumed within the community organization, when timely, efficient and effective planning cannot occur.

Research participants described the varied and relative value of different lengths and formats of placements. They described the length of the placement as paramount to achieving valuable capacity building. Longer placements usually netted more significant contributions by students. This is congruent with the work of Enos and Morton (2003),

who compare time, depth and complexity in learning partnerships and their likelihood of moving from transactional to transformational outcomes. The research participants expressed frustration about the lack of preparation and ongoing support to some students and inadequate campus staff resources invested in the relationship. They noted agency staffing focus shifting from clients to students, when dealing with unprepared students.

The community partners discussed ethical practice and mutual professional respect issues, and how each influences staff morale. Several noted demoralization of agency staff who did not feel respected or acknowledged by academic peers. Their comments are supported by Leiderman et al. (2003) in their discussion of the importance of parity in healthy campus–community partnerships. Finally the community partner discussed the expectations of students and the degree to which they invest in meaningful placements and continue to support the organization. All participants reported disappointment in low rates of continued volunteerism among students after their placements.

Looking to the Future

Research participants described models of collaboration and initiatives that they felt would escalate capacity value for them. They discussed interdisciplinary collaboration of multiple programs within a campus. These ideas are also introduced in the work of Jacoby et al. (2003). Research participants considered how both nonprofit organization and campus partners might work together more effectively for the benefit of the wider community and in support of larger transformational change initiatives. The community partners also described cooperation between several institutions of higher learning over a longer term to create systemic change. Jacoby et al. further described

models of cooperation between and within campus institutions, involving academic, student affairs, and student constituents. Research participants supported stronger links between curricular, co-curricular, and non-curricular community-engaged learning, both formal and informal. Community partners explored the changes required to implement some of their hopes for the future and the processes and infrastructure that might support it.

The research participants invited campus partners to learn more about the voluntary and nonprofit sector, and the day-to-day realities of their organization's mission and operations. They expressed interest in playing a greater role in teaching students about the sector. They asked campus partners for cooperation in consulting more and providing greater lead time to plan and negotiate. They suggested greater flexibility in shaping placements. These requests support the findings of Sandy (2007). The community partners requested more campus staff investment and support in student placements, including the provision of learning and assessment tools, as well as ongoing supervision.

Access to the wider college and university is important to the community partners. They expressed interest in the activities and evolution of the institution, as well as information about specific areas of study that might link to their mission and operations. They described a need for communication and information management systems within both nonprofit community organizations, and campuses that would make information sharing less difficult. The shared experiences of the research participants are summarized in the following conclusions.

Seeing Fully: Interdependence and Systems Awareness

The low level of awareness of campus-partners and community-partners, with respect to their interdependent community-engaged learning relationship, influences their motivation to evaluate and enhance practice. Without this awareness there is no understanding of systems connections or sustainability issues. This lack of awareness is supported by a general absence of detailed community-partner presence in the community-engaged learning literature (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Many campus-partners seem unaware of the vulnerability of these campus-community learning partnerships.

Learning institutions require greater organizational intelligence regarding their relationships with community partners. These partnerships not only benefit student learning, they also build important social capital for both the campus and nonprofit community organizations. These relationships further galvanize community capacity in the widest sense, strengthening the regional community of study. The resources and relationships linked through campus–community collaboration are extensive and inter-related. Research findings illustrate the disconnection between working units in colleges and universities that require more intentional leadership and support of community-engaged learning specifically and campus-community partnerships generally.

Awareness and valuing of the collaborative relationships is a first step in which colleges and universities must invest for better understanding. Research participants noted an absence of practical understanding by many campus partners about the day-to-day impact of student placements, and how campus requests and actions impact the ongoing operations of the organization. While this was particularly true of campus

partners, it was also an issue within community partner organizations. Research participants noted that senior administrators and board governors are often unaware of the investment that their frontline staff makes in building and sustaining effective external relationships. Policy makers, who influence curriculum and funding, may also be removed from capacity-consuming issues resulting from their decisions. This position is further demonstrated when insufficient resources or unreasonable expectations are allocated to student placement processes by government, colleges and universities.

Knowledge of the Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector

Research participants described an inconsistent understanding, by campus partners, about the purpose, mission, and roles of the voluntary, nonprofit sector in the wider community. The knowledge of faculty and students, about the nonprofit sector and individual community-based organizations, influences the way in which they interact with community partners and their expectations of community-engaged learning. Generalization and lack of investigation about specific organizations as unique entities, further creates gaps in realistic expectations, often causing hard feelings and tension.

Cross-Sectoral Collaborations as Cross-Cultural Relationships

Understanding of differing organizational cultures, and the cross-cultural skills to work effectively with one another, is critical in developing trust, communication, and shared goals. Schein (2004) describes organizational culture as “shared assumptions that come to be taken for granted and which determine a group’s behavior” (p. 22). The lack of awareness about differences and similarities in organizational culture, between campus and community, can compromise effective communication and relationships. This was

reflected by research participants in their comments about nonprofit community and campus resources, values, reward systems, and priorities. Opportunities to explore and consider cultural differences in the context of shared goals may be important to more effective collaborative communication and relationships.

The Value of Social Capital and Community Engagement Opportunities

Community partners emphasized the value of social and network capital generated through campus-community relationships, such as student placements. They stressed the importance of ongoing and future opportunities to advocate, to recruit staff, volunteers and donors, and to benefit from other forms of community engagement. These outcomes were discussed by all research participants and are one of the major factors that influence their desire to invest in campus-community initiatives, including student placements. Without effective means to nurture these goals through the campus-community collaboration, the partnership loses considerable value from the community-partner's perspective. The desire and resources required to build such relationships by some colleges and universities is imperative to enhancing future success in partnering with the nonprofit community.

Balanced Effort and Outcome

Students and faculty may sometimes have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in learning partnerships. This is particularly true based on time constraints, coupled with the level of student skill and experience, and the complexity of the desired learning processes and growth. Finally, the level of investment demonstrated by both students and campus partners must be proportionate to the desired outcomes. While all

community-engaged learning experiences cannot generate immediate and significant benefits for community-partners, creating capacity deficits for them through understaffing by campus-partners, influences the nonprofit organization's desire to partner.

Timing and Duration of Placement

The length and timing of student placements influences the quality of the roles offered students, their ability to see the impact of their actions, and the opportunity to reflect on their learning. When placements are too short or compressed, community organizations are unable to integrate students in work that is both meaningful and useful, especially without consuming the organization's resources.

Research participants described longer placements spanning terms, or ongoing projects extending over a year, to be the most helpful, even if limited to part-time roles. Short, condensed placements of a few hours through to intensive placements of a few weeks were generally seen to be least helpful, and frequently out of proportion in value, to the front-end investment made by the community organization. However, some participants welcomed placements of varied lengths, because the diversity of requests aligned with varied and emerging goals and projects. They were more able to integrate larger numbers of students using this approach; however, the time investment by students remained the primary determinate of value to the organization. Community partners also noted the significant resources required to custom design and support many different roles because of student program rigidity and the need to conform to each educational institution and program's criteria. At the same time, the nonprofit partners are often left

with front-end screening and placement costs, which are not in proportion to the service and learning linked to the placement.

Most colleges and universities place students at the same times of year. This challenges community partners to identify enough substantial placement opportunities at the same time. Staggered or atypical scheduling of placements was seen as helpful, as long as planning and consultation occur.

Student Placements as a Human Resources Development Strategy

All research participants described student placements as a critical aspect of their human resources capacity, particularly in ensuring a future workforce and volunteer involvement. They described student placements as a catalyst for students in considering paid and volunteer career options in the nonprofit sector. They noted placements were an opportunity to identify and nurture talent, as well as assess prospective staff. Particularly in the current climate of staff and volunteer shortages, they believed that building a relationship with prospective employees and volunteers over time, would allow them more success in recruitment. Research participants also suggested that student involvement gave them opportunities to shape the practice of future colleagues and to influence the content and processes taught in colleges and universities. The depth and scope of the student experience was noted as a key factor in achieving these goals and an important reason to invest in community-engaged learning.

Human resource development is critical to nonprofit community partners, particularly in the currently vulnerable human services sub-sector. Student placements for community-engaged learning purposes connect to many facets of Canadian work force strategies currently being developed provincially and nationally in support of the

voluntary, nonprofit sector. Campus and community partners could be more intentional about considering how student placements, utilizing diverse forms of community-engaged learning, support these strategies. Based on the research conclusions, public and other funder support for many of the resource mechanisms and processes suggested in research findings would be congruent with many nonprofit sector labour force development goals.

Nonprofit Partner Consultation and Support

Community partners should be consulted, actively and authentically, when considering curriculum, programming or policy decisions that require involvement by nonprofit community organizations. All research participants noted dissatisfaction with current consultation and planning processes that affect them. Universities and colleges must consider more mechanisms to formally and effectively acknowledge decisions related to programming that impacts community partners. Just as new or revised programs of study are scrutinized for rigor and resources, so too should any community-engagement aspects of the proposed learning approach. Most importantly, authentic participation, by community partners in program decisions, must guide the processes used. Curriculum and program development must consider the real costs and benefits to all partners by using a balanced scorecard approach.

The preparation of community partners to host students requires appropriate tools and processes that consider the community partner's resources and capacity. These enablers must be complete, accessible, realistic, and time sensitive. They include negotiating, contracting, progress monitoring, learning reflection, and assessing processes and tools. Community partners noted ambiguity in establishment of role clarity and

concrete methods of assessing and reporting student work. They further expressed concern for the lengthy and wide-reaching student assessments they were asked to participate in, which were often outside the scope of their resources and expertise.

Research participants universally cited insufficient lead time for planning and forecasting to be a challenge. At the same time, the burden that pre-admission mandated community service (career-related volunteer hours) makes on them is difficult, when rushed and concentrated in a short period. These mandated volunteer hours, while not formally defined community-engaged learning, are required to apply to many university and college programs and are often assigned for the purpose of career research. Prospective students often expect to find volunteer opportunities within a compressed time period and in skilled roles they may not be qualified for. While mandatory pre-admission hours, used for career research and student screening, are seen as helpful by campus programs, they must be reconsidered and if essential, redesigned to consider the needs of community partners. Campuses often mandate actions that influence community organizations, while taking no accountability for the outcomes. Prospective students, while following campus admission expectations, do not fall within the realm of campus legal and support systems, consequently often leaving a burden on community partners. The tension and ill-will resulting from some of these experiences, often influences the community-partner's attitude in hosting future student placements and in some cases creates a community relations problem with the student, leading to a poor view of nonprofit organizations generally.

Student Preparation and Support

Student preparation and support are critical in developing the full potential of campus-community learning initiatives. Community partners described insufficient involvement by many campus Faculty and supervisors. They noted student–instructor ratios that are ineffective and the varying priorities of faculty based on their other responsibilities. Inadequate supervision and planning conflicts with quality student and community-partner engagement. Overtaxed faculty are often unavailable to support students and community-partners, sometimes defaulting responsibility to already busy frontline community workers.

Community partners further described student priorities, maturity, ethical behaviour, and realistic expectations, as key areas of concern. Start-up support by faculty for student placements is often promising, however, sometimes wanes as the placement evolves, with primary focus on document deliverables. Research participants discussed the importance of committed and sufficient faculty support in preparing and supporting both students and their respective community partners.

Community partners require adequate human resources to create and benefit from student involvement. Research participants reported positive student involvement when the placements were supported by dedicated staff positions in their organizations that provided support to students as part of their role. When volunteer or student engagement is defined as a core responsibility, rather than supplementary, staff exhibited a more positive view of student involvement. They felt more supported in carrying out their responsibilities in relation to campus–community partnerships. Policy and funding support for dedicated job positions, such as managers of volunteers, and filled by trained

and experienced staff, would be helpful to many organizations. These roles support capacity-building required to capture the positive value generated by student involvement and, in turn, build human resources capacity for the community partner.

Just Say No! - The Ability of Community Partners to Decline Placements

Power inequities and community relations play a significant role in a community partner choosing to decline or end ineffective campus–community partnership initiatives, including student placements. The value of community engagement to most agencies is critical, and some organizations are reluctant to limit potentially valuable relationships. Some are concerned about negative reaction from entities upon which they are dependant. Power differential in some relationships precludes making situational decisions related to appropriateness and capacity. Real and perceived inequity in power between campus and community partners influences the shape of the relationship (Butin, 2005; Enos & Morton, 2003; Winter et al., 2002). Finally within community organizations, there may be differing opinions about the value of community-engaged learning and the resources directed to such activities, which may cause tension between volunteers and staff, as well as difficulty with external partners.

The Reciprocity Expressed in the Relationship

Mutual benefit sustains many campus–community relationships. The level of expressed reciprocity between partners influences perception and attitudes towards each other and the value of the partnership. Community partners sometimes find little recognition for their investment in student placements, when they seek access to other campus resources such as recruitment opportunities, information, reduced fees, or access

to facilities. At the same time, research participants noted disproportionate investment by the nonprofit community partner, in providing experiential learning opportunities without any financial support. While participants clearly stated they were not seeking direct payment, they did see inequity in supporting direct and indirect infrastructure and enabling costs, much of the time.

Nonprofit community partners see universities and colleges as part of their wider community; just as campus partners view community organizations as their neighbours. Universities and colleges seek increased access to community organizations to achieve their mission. Community partners expect the same from campus partners. At the most basic level, community partners require access to resources to effectively support community-engaged learning. These may include faculty time and commitment, lead-time for planning, and resources for student preparation. Secondly, community partners also value other campus resources that assist them in building organizational and community capacity, including social capital. The resources noted in the research data include, but are not limited to, access to student and staff communication vehicles, use of surplus and joint-use space, access to institutional learning resources, use of institutional expertise, and fee reductions or waivers.

Reciprocity in the sharing of resources and access are symbolic in demonstrating collaborative values. Campus partners should consider each relationship with a community organization as a unique experience, consulting with community partners about both their assets and needs.

Transactional and Transformational Goals and Outcomes

A notable finding relates to the differences in perception between short- and long-term change and benefits accrued from the relationship. Enos and Morton (2003) posit that partnerships have the potential not to just complete immediate goals, but to transform individuals, organizations, institutions, and communities. “In authentic partnerships, the complex dynamics of the relationship mean that the partners face the continuing possibility of being transformed through their relationship with one and other in large and small ways” (p. 20). They note that most relationships begin through transactional, exchange-based activity designed to fulfill short-term goals. The initial commitment is focused on meeting each partner's expectations through management within existing systems and distinct identities. As the relationship matures, there is the possibility of creating longer term, transformational change, through increased aspirations by both parties. This includes a desire to look at issues more broadly, transcendence of self-interest, dynamic collaborative leadership, and combined and accessible infrastructure and resources. The critical growth in the depth and meaning of the partnership is dependant upon values, attitudes, and larger shared goals. In such “dynamic, joint creations . . . all people involved create knowledge, transact power, mix personal and institutional interests and make meaning” (p. 25).

It would seem that many campus-community initiatives are stalled in repetitive and reoccurring efforts to establish the administrative frameworks required of each partner, often not achieving transactional let alone transformational change. The relative youth of the community-engaged learning movement in Canada may influence this stage

of lifecycle in many partnerships. It would seem that both campuses and community organizations have a desire to move beyond this state.

Community partners described the importance of some transactional outcomes in the midst of longer-term, transformational goals. Research participants acknowledged that there are often no immediate short-term benefits to community partners generated by some student placements. While community partners valued the importance of investment in long-term development of students, and in effective community engagement, they felt they were often measured and held accountable to shorter-term outcomes by their organization and other stakeholders, such as funders. Bushouse (2005) notes the preference by nonprofit community organizations for more short-term transactional outputs, in addition to broader transformational goals. These contribute to timely value and visible outcomes that are required to sustain the resources and capacity to fulfill the community partner's mission.

At the same time, the literature reflects more emphasis on transformational, long-term benefits, such as enhanced civic involvement, systemic impact on societal challenges, and vocational development by students (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Hayes & King, 2006). The nonprofit community partners, like their campus colleagues, value transformational goals related to change, growth, and development. However, many exist in more vulnerable, resource-challenged contexts and require some transactional outcomes to perceive value in the relationship.

While short, focused projects and initiatives are often helpful, long-term relationships, capable of generating systemic change, are also required. Research participants noted their desire to create a greater community legacy through community-

engaged learning, not simply as a vehicle to facilitate short-term transactional outcomes. Social change, and other growth valued by both campus and community, takes time, sustained focus, and significant resources. Leveraging of multiple opportunities potentially created through collaboration depends upon longer-term transformational thinking and change strategy. Stakeholders should facilitate more inclusive, flexible, and timely planning processes that allow for creativity and long-term partnership opportunity development.

Holistic Institutional Perspective versus Program-Centric Focus

Participants described inconsistent and program-centric relationships with colleges and universities. Many research participants described excellent relationships with some programs of study. At the same time, they have also experienced competitiveness between programs within the same institution and find faculty knowledge levels, about other campus programs and services other than their own, is low.

Community organizations often find it difficult to get access, information and referrals to other entities within partnering campuses. For example, there are often few targeted opportunities to promote volunteer opportunities to students, staff and faculty on campus. This is congruent with the nature of loosely-coupled institutions of higher education described by Jacoby (2003). Community partners value many aspects of their campus partnership beyond the student relationship and expressed frustration in lack of communication and institutional access. Many community partners sought opportunities to engage with the whole organization, not one narrow entity. This is consistent with the relationship focus of nonprofit culture that generates bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), rather than specialization or bonding social capital sometimes encouraged in

academia. Research participants valued access and relationships highly, and cited more positive attitudes towards partnering with coordinated and open campus partners.

Pigza and Troop (2003) describe three models of relationship and infrastructure prevalent in community engaged learning: concentrated, fragmented, and integrated (pp. 110–111). Concentrated models of operating involve one way communication from campus to community and little internal communication by the university or college. Access to the campus by the community is barrier-filled and controlled through centralized formal entities. Community partners are not recognized for their assets and knowledge. The fragmented model offers limited access and two-way communication. Overall respect and interaction are enhanced over the concentrated model; however, most campus units contribute little, and there is no strong leadership or coordination, leading to desired outcomes. Integrated models encourage internal and external campus communication, facilitated by many strong individual relationships. Campus boundaries are permeable, and campus and community see themselves as equals in a larger community. Shared goal setting and learning are evident and seen as mutually beneficial. Expertise and resources related to community-engaged learning are focused in specific work units in both campus and community, who promote, support, and coordinate throughout the entire system. The models experienced by research participants span all three approaches; however, integration was the least described, but most desired model.

The integrated approach demonstrated shared commitment by all stakeholders for successful outcomes. While essential partnering resources and expertise are coordinated in some fashion, the philosophy and desire to work together is widespread in the organizations. At the same time, many relationships and network connections keep the

partnerships strong. “If momentum for a particular initiative gets road blocked in one area, it can be rerouted elsewhere to accomplish its purpose. Not only do campus units link community partners, but community partners link campus unit together” (Pigza & Troop, 2003, p. 113).

These infrastructure, integration, and coordination issues support the experiences of research participants in working with campus partners. Some Edmonton region campus partners have developed or are attempting to design diverse support and liaison mechanisms to encourage collaboration. The degree to which effective connections are supported influences the desire of community partners to sustain a working partnership.

Investment in Infrastructure

Infrastructure and appropriate human resources to support students are critical factors in success. Infrastructure to support both the campus–community collaborative relationship generally, and student placements specifically, are scarce or fragmented in the geographic region of study. While several Edmonton area universities and colleges have made significant effort in evolving intermediary resources that support links between campus and community, there is much still to be done. At the same time, community resources in the region, such as Volunteer Centres and other capacity-building or support organizations, are fragmented and inconsistent in their ability to act as connectors between campus and community. Many organizations struggle with what their role in these endeavours is, or in developing targeted resources useful to students, faculty, and other nonprofit community organizations. All stakeholders could strengthen understanding of both the achievements and challenges related to community-engaged

learning, through use of their internal and external communications. Furthermore, current agency networks, capacity building and intermediary organizations, campus committees, funder coalitions, and other existing working groups could convene opportunities for dialogue about synergies and barriers related to campus–community learning collaboration.

There is considerable untapped potential in developing structural support and resources to sustain and further solidify long-term working relationships both within campuses and the local community. Research participants described the responsibility for sustaining relationships usually falls on pioneering individuals on campus or in individual nonprofit organizations. While this effort often enhances capacity for the community in the end, it also reduces focus on mission and current operations by over-stressed pioneers and sustainers.

Participants noted that community partners require policies, planning, and staff assigned to support placements. Pigza and Troop (2003) describe the importance of infrastructure. In many larger community organizations, the presence of a skilled manager of volunteers allows for information and referral, screening, and orientation required for placements. Those organizations that did not have similar resources were unable to capture the potential capacity generated by student placements. Capacity attracts and generates capacity.

While supporting new capacity-building efforts is often an issue for policy makers and funders, community-based organizations can also leverage capacity by working together. Collaborating small and unstaffed organizations could partner with

complementary community partners to create the critical mass and shared resources to engage students effectively, to the benefit of all involved.

In communities where formal service-learning partnerships are more evolved, additional infrastructure to support campus–community partnerships exists. When narrowed to actual day-to-day support for community-engaged learning, several mechanisms might be used by Edmonton region universities and colleges to support an integrated approach. These include the institutional development of a centre of expertise and facilitation, as well as multiple gateways to serve learning and community-engagement opportunities within a college or university (Pigza & Troope, 2003). This dual strategy stresses the value and balance of each component.

In this model, a centralized unit provides broader communication and coordination, while acting as a promoter of community-engaged learning internally and externally. At the same time the unit might also incubate new projects.

The central entity is coupled with a number of decentralized and varied communities of interest throughout the institution and community. These communities of interest, or gateways, develop as opportunities emerge and work relatively independently. They, however, also benefit from expertise, resources, and communication vehicles sustained through the centre of expertise and facilitation infrastructure (Pigza & Troope, 2003).

Because gateways are connected to the campus-wide infrastructure for service-learning, they provide appropriate referrals to students, faculty, staff, and community partners seeking additional service-learning resources, information, and opportunities. Gateways offer initial access to the activities and concepts of service learning, through co-curricular, curricular, and information-exchange programs. (p. 123)

This integrated model supports some autonomy and flexibility, while using the critical mass of coordinated resources and networks. At the same time, it addresses community partner concerns, without over structuring and bureaucratizing the process and infrastructure.

Incremental enhancements could be initiated with existing resources. Community partners could enhance their websites and written communications to provide more detail, allowing for both interest generation and self-screening of prospective students and volunteers. Campus partners could enhance their websites with areas designed for the community partner's interests and perspectives, in much the same way they customize sites for prospective students. Providing information about a full range of programs and services that connect to community partners provides easier access and a single institutional information site. This approach does not discourage personal conversation, but does provide more efficient access to frequently discussed topics, while allowing for self-service, saving both time and resources.

Respect and Professionalism

Participants reported excellent relationships with many campus partners. However, they experienced varied levels of understanding by academic colleagues about their own professional experience, training, and credentials, as well as standards and quality control in their organizations. Paradoxically, campus partners often sought community experience for students and deemed it valuable, while not fully respecting their community colleagues as peers. Professional respect, including ethical and thoughtful behaviour, was cited as a supporting factor in shaping attitudes that support collaboration.

Recognition and Support for Faculty and Staff

Both staff in community organizations and faculty who invest significantly in the quality of effective relationships often go unrecognized and unrewarded, because their efforts are not always formally aligned with their roles. Both require support and recognition to sustain their motivation. Research participants described both campus and community partners, as individuals, who have shown leadership in learning partnerships, but who suffer from lack of support in their own environments.

In academia, research and teaching are priorities. In nonprofit community organizations, service delivery and advocacy are primary. Community-engaged learning may fall outside traditional priorities and reward systems. Boyer (1990) promotes a scholarship of engagement that values collaboration and learning, as do Jackson, Graham, and Maslove (2000). Campus and community organizations must consider the value of community-engaged learning to their respective enterprises and, in turn, enhance outdated reward and support systems that currently undermine community engagement.

Individuals and work units involved in efforts to support community-engagement, including student placements, must be recognized as doing real work, congruent with the mission and goals of their respective organizations. Alongside the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of engagement should be rewarded and supported in the academic environment. In community-based organizations, the value and importance of community-engagement that supports an organization's mission must be valued equally with direct service to clients to sustain capacity (Hall et al., 2003).

Change and Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative initiatives, particularly those as complex as campus–community partnerships, require leadership at many levels. Personal leadership, illustrated by the initiative taken by many community and campus partners as individual pioneers, innovators, and sustainers, is critical. Strength in partnerships continues to be fuelled by individuals rather than organizations, especially in the absence of institutionalized policy and infrastructure. Sustainability and growth cannot be achieved through these efforts alone.

Leadership, through governance and in senior management, is also key in aligning organizational mission, goals, and operations. Academic leaders, committed to community-engaged learning, must be equally committed to equity in partnerships and the scholarship of engagement. Nonprofit, community organization governors and managers must also value and implement parallel principles through investment in infrastructure to support student involvement, campus–community partnerships, and other forms of related community engagement. Community partners must skilfully balance their needs and the assets required for current operation, with investment in future longer-term outcomes.

Visionary leadership by other stakeholders, including funders and policy makers, also influences the likely evolution of community-engaged learning to its full potential. Like other approaches to social change and personal growth, community-engaged learning is difficult to measure and quantify. Investment in policies and funding that support capacity-building initiatives to support this activity are even more challenging to assess. Willingness to experiment, take risks, and consider long-term outcomes is critical

in supporting the evolution of community-engaged learning as an approach to sustaining and further developing nonprofit organizations and community.

Implications for Future Research

This study offers opportunities to consider future exploration into related issues. These include further inquiry into effective infrastructure to support learning partnerships and models of integrating many of the concepts discussed in this research inquiry, to support effective and equitable partnerships.

Conclusion

Many well planned Edmonton based community-engaged learning initiatives are yielding significant value for partners. However, as demand for student placements in community nonprofit organizations increases, caution must be exercised. Attention to fair value and equity in campus-community partnerships must be demonstrated more consistently; supported through planning, infrastructure, and relational enhancements. Campuses and community partners not able to provide quality in these dimensions require support in considering the impact of their expectations and actions on the long term sustainability of all community-engaged learning partnerships.

The research findings suggest that multiple factors influence the value generated for community partners, by participating in student placements. These factors include issues related to partner awareness, attitudes, role clarity, recognition, investment, flexibility, resources, infrastructure, expectations, and collaborative skill.

Implications from the conclusions of the research follow a number of themes. These include partner relationships, consultation, human resources development, infrastructure development, community engagement, and leadership.

References

- Blumenthal, B. (2003). *Investing in capacity building*. New York: The Foundation Centre.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities for the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Bushouse, B. (2005). Community nonprofit organizations and service-learning: Resource constraints to building partnerships with universities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 12(1), 32-40.
- Bringle, R. D., & Hatcher, J. (2002). Campus-community partnerships: The terms of engagement [Electronic version]. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 58(3), 503–516. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Butin, D. (2005). *Service-learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cruz, N. I., & Giles, D. E. (2000). Where's the community in service-learning research? [Abstract]. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* (Special Issue). Retrieved January 30, 2007, from <http://www.umich.edu/~mjcs/volumes/2000abstracts.html>
- Edwards, B., Mooney, L., & Heald, C. (2001). Who is being served? The impact of student volunteering on community organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30(3), 444–461. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- El Ansari, W. & Phillips, C. (2004). The costs and benefits to participants in community partnerships: A paradox. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5(1), 35–48. Retrieved December 2, 2007, from <http://hpp.sagepub/cgi/content/abstract/5/1/35>
- Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 20–41). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Floyd, A. (2007). Collaborative avenues to build capacity. In P. Stone Motes & P. McCartt Hess (Eds.), *Collaborating with community-based organizations through consultation and technical assistance* (pp. 81–115). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goldenberg, M. (2006). *Building blocks for strong communities*. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from http://nonprofitscan.imaginecanada.ca/files/en/misc/building_blocks_for_strong_communities_small_and_medium_sized_enterprises.pdf

-
- Graff, L. (2006). *Volunteering and mandatory community service: A discussion paper*. Ottawa, ON, Canada: Volunteer Canada.
- Hall, M., Lasby, D., Gunulka, G., & Tryon, C. (2000). *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: The Canadian survey of giving, volunteering and participating*. Ottawa, ON, Canada: Statistics Canada.
- Hall, M., Andrukow, A., Barr, C., de Wit, M., Embuldenya, D., Jolin, L., et al. (2003). *The capacity to serve: A qualitative study of the challenges facing Canada's voluntary and nonprofit organizations*. Retrieved January 30, 2007, from http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/Files/nsnvo/capacity_to_serve.pdf
- Hall, M. H., de Wit, M. L., Lasby, D., McIver, D., Evers, T., Johnston, C., et al. (2005). *Cornerstones of community: Highlights of the national survey of non-profit and voluntary organizations* (rev. ed.). Retrieved April 15, 2007, from http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/pdf/NSNVO_Report_English.pdf
- Jackson, E., Graham, K., & Maslove, A. (2000). Enhancing university-community partnerships: Retooling the academy for more effective engagement in civil society. *Education through Partnership, 14*(2), 16–30.
- Jacoby, B. (Ed.). (2003). *Building partnerships for service-learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jacoby, B., Albert, G., Bucco, D., Busch, J., Enos, S., Fisher, I., et al. (1996). *Service-learning in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kibbe, B., Canales, J., Enwright, K., Cortes Culwell, A., Sobrato Sonsim, L. Sperm, S. K. et al. (2004). *Funding effectiveness: Lessons in building nonprofit capacity*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lashby, D. (2004). *The volunteer spirit in Canada: Motivations and barriers*. Retrieved February 8, 2007, from http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Volunteer_Spirit.pdf
- Leiderman, S., Furco, A., Zapf, J., & Goss, M. (2003). *Building partnerships with college campuses: Community perspectives*. Washington, DC: Council of Independent Colleges.
- Marullo, S., & Edwards, B. (2000). From charity to justice: The potential for university-community partnerships and social change. *American Behavioral Scientist, 43*(5), 895–912. Retrieved January 3, 2008 from Sage Publications database.
- Mattessich, P. W. & Monsey, B. R. (1992). *Collaboration: What makes it work*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Foundation.

- Maurrasse, D. J. (2002). Higher education- community partnerships: Assessing Progress in the Field. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31, 131. Retrieved March 25, 2007, from Sage Publication database.
- Ostrander, S. A. (2004). Democracy, civic participation, and the university: A comparative study of civic engagement on five campuses. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33, 74. Retrieved March 17, 2007, from Sage Publication database.
- Pigza, J., & Troppe, M. (2003). Developing an infrastructure for service-learning and community engagement. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 106–130). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Touchstone.
- Sandy, M. (2007). *Community voices: A California Campus Compact study on partnerships*. San Francisco: Campus Compact.
- Sandy, M., & Holland, B. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 13(1), 30–43.
- Schein, E. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3rd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Statistics Canada. (2004). *Canadian survey of giving and volunteering*. Retrieved January 8, 2007, from <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca>
- Torres, J. (Ed.). (2000). *Benchmarks for campus/community partnerships*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.
- Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2000) Community-centered service learning: Moving from doing for to doing with. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 43, 767–780. Retrieved March 27, 2007, from Sage Journals Online database.
- Weiss, E., Miller-Anderson, R., & Lasker, R. (2002). Making the most of collaboration: Exploring the relationship between partnership synergy and partnership functioning. *Health Education and Behavior*, 29, 683. Retrieved December 2, 2007, from <http://heb.sagepub.com>
- Wheatley, M., & Kellner-Rogers, M. (1998). *The promise and paradox of community*. Retrieved May 9, 2007, from <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/paradox.html>
- Winter, A., Wiseman, J., & Muirhead, B. (2002). *Beyond rhetoric: University-community engagement in Victoria*. Australia: Creative Commons. Available from <http://www.eidos.org.au>

Worrall, L. (2007). Asking the community: A case study of community partner perspectives [Abstract]. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 14(1).