Student Perceptions of Community-based Research Partners and the Politics of Knowledge

Emily W. Kane
Bates College

Based on quantitative survey data and qualitative data from journal entries by students in a seminar focused on community-based research, undergraduate student perceptions of community partners are explored in the context of debates about the politics of knowledge. Student perceptions that frame community partners as the recipients of academic expertise are differentiated from those that validate partner expertise as essential to the co-creation of knowledge. Evidence is presented indicating that appropriately structured courses, especially those supported by robust institutional infrastructure for community-engaged learning, can (and should) encourage students to recognize community partners as valuable sources of knowledge.

Advocates for community-based learning in higher education increasingly emphasize the importance of reciprocity, and encourage students and faculty to recognize community partners as sources of knowledge. In this article, undergraduate student perceptions of community-based research partners are analyzed based on a quantitative survey and a qualitative analysis of student journal entries in two offerings of a junior-senior research seminar entitled "Public Sociology." The seminar involved readings on the politics of knowledge as well as community-based research (CBR) methods. In addition, students engaged in CBR, working in small groups with partners from agencies and organizations in the local community. Results indicate that over the course of the seminar, students became more likely to perceive their community partners as valuable contributors to learning and knowledge generation.

The analysis of student perceptions is situated in a brief review of the literature on community-based learning, with particular attention to reciprocity and the politics of knowledge as those concepts have developed in the relevant literature. With that context sketched, the seminar, data available from it, and data analysis approach are introduced (including the strengths and limitations of the data). On the basis of that analysis, it is argued that an appropriately structured course, especially one supported by institutional infrastructure that legitimates reciprocal community engagement, can encourage students to recognize community partners as valuable sources of knowledge. As one student put it, "it was amazing getting to know people with experiences and knowledge far beyond my own." But encouraging that recognition requires considerable attention, as the hegemony of academically-generated knowledge seeps into even an explicitly reciprocal framing of the knowledge-making process.

Reciprocity and the Politics of Knowledge in Community-Based Learning

In a review of trends in community-engaged learning, Zlotkowski and Duffy (2010, p. 34) argue that "it is impossible to trace the recent history of community-based teaching and learning without understanding its symbiotic relationship to a broader set of developments in the contemporary academy." In their widely-cited book on community-based research (CBR), Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, and Donohue (2003) follow the same approach, situating their advocacy for CBR within a set of questions about the political economy of the academy in the United States. From Boyer's (1990) critique of limiting definitions of faculty scholarship that sometimes discourage publicly-oriented faculty work to national reports calling for greater institutional engagement in the public good (e.g., Kellogg Commission, 1999; The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012), many have called for curricular and institutional change in higher education. Strand et al. (2003) summarize three forces they consider particularly important in this regard:

> Two of them—widespread criticism of higher education's disconnection from communities and growing concern about the professorate's exceedingly narrow definition of research—originated outside the institutions…The third force, recognition of the need to develop students' civic capacity and prepare them for active democratic citizenship, came largely from within the institutions themselves. (p. 1)

The pedagogies that have thrived in this climate of institutional support for community-engaged learning cover a wide range of practices. Strand et al.

(2003) argue that among such practices, CBR is a particularly promising one. Their model of CBR includes a social change/social justice orientation in its very definition, making it a special type of what Mooney and Edwards (2001) call service-learning advocacy or what Mitchell (2008) calls critical service-learning:

> CBR has a long and diverse history, and this history provides a basis for the three major principles that guide our model of CBR for higher education institutions: collaboration (with community partners); validation of multiple sources of knowledge and methods of discovery and dissemination; and the goals of social change and social action to achieve social justice. (Strand et al., 2003, p. 15)

Validation of community knowledge is emphasized by Mitchell (2008) as well, when she succinctly notes that "Reciprocity in the service-learning experience seeks to create an environment where all learn from and teach one another" (p. 58).[1] This approach resonates with another element of Zlotkowski and Duffy's (2010) review. They emphasize the importance of not just the academic and cognitive benefits of community-based learning, but the civic benefits as well, which they see as truly realized only by reciprocal engagement. As Scobey (2010) points out, realizing civic benefits requires "de-centering" the process of community-engaged learning through greater recognition of the knowledge community partners bring to the CBR process.

> A pedagogy that remains too exclusively focused on the dramaturgy of the teacher-student encounter, or the community of students in the classroom, may inadvertently send the message that students will remain the center of their own civic experience. Community partners have a crucial role to play in this de-centering process, not simply as fellow citizens, and certainly not as objects of academic expertise or philanthropy, but as interlocutors and co-educators. (p. 195)

In a recent essay on "Putting into practice the civic purposes of higher education," Saltmarsh and Zlotkowski (2011) also address this connection specifically. They argue that reciprocity and real participation by a broad range of community members, as well as respect for the knowledge that broad range of participants offers, is critical to meaningful civic engagement. Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011, p. 16), in another recent collection, synthesize current debates and analyses in the literature with an explicit call for democratic epistemology and a "multidirectional flow of knowledge," identifying the "power and politics of expert academic knowledge" as "the core obstacle" to genuine civic engagement. Disrupting

that power is, thus, an important step in realizing engagement: "When knowledge generation…is a process of co-creation…then democratic forms of civic engagement are more likely to emerge and become institutionalized" (p. 298).

This kind of emphasis has appeared in review essays like the examples just noted, and also in specific research studies investigating community partner perceptions (e.g., Bucher, 2012; d'Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009; Sandy & Holland, 2006). As d'Arlach et al. (2009) conclude on the basis of their interviews with community members who participated in a service-learning language exchange program, an interview project framed by Freire's (1970) approach to the politics of knowledge, "results favor a service-learning class format where community recipients can have expert roles…(and) knowledge is assumed to be co-created and multidirectional" (p. 5). Greater recognition of community partner expertise should be encouraged among faculty and students, but studies document the need to encourage it among community partners too, as they are sometimes inclined to view academic partners as the experts even though community knowledge is essential to the enterprise (Bacon, 2002; Bucher, 2012).

Critical attention to the politics of knowledge, and disruption of the hegemony of expert knowledge, is central to the CBR model that Strand et al. (2003) advance, and the model that frames the seminar analyzed in this article.

> CBR requires acknowledging the validity of local knowledge generated in and through practice in community settings and weighing that alongside institutionalized, scientific and scholarly professional knowledge familiar to faculty and students. Put simply, community-based researchers are interested in…how each form of knowledge informs and guides the other. (p. 11)

The Public Sociology Seminar, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Striking some similar notes, but rarely overlapping with these trends in community engagement across higher education, is increasing attention within the discipline of sociology to what Michael Burawoy (2005) has called public sociology. Burawoy's argument focuses on a division of sociological labor based on the type of knowledge pursued (instrumental knowledge aimed at technical problem-solving, or reflexive knowledge produced through a dialogue about ends) and the audience to which work is directed (an academic or extra-academic audience). Based on these two dimensions, he identifies four types of sociological labor: professional (instrumental knowledge, academic audience); policy (instrumental

knowledge, extra-academic audience); critical (reflexive knowledge, academic audience); and public (reflexive knowledge, extra-academic audience). He considers all four types important parts of the broader whole of the discipline, but advocates for greater recognition and reward, as well as expanded practice, for public sociology in the face of increasing specialization and professionalization.[2]

It is at the intersection of the public sociology movement and Strand et al.'s (2003) model of CBR that the seminar for sociology majors and minors analyzed in this article was defined. The catalog description summarizes the focus of the seminar.

> Sociologists have debated the relationship between the discipline and broader publics for well over a century. In recent years, renewed debate has developed around the promise of public sociology, which former American Sociological Association president Michael Burawoy defines as a sociology that 'engages publics beyond the academy in dialogue about matters of political and moral concern.' This seminar introduces students to competing perspectives on public sociology, including attention to the history of the discipline's orientation toward public issues and public audiences. With those debates as context, students engage in the practice of public sociology through community-based research (CBR) projects on issues related to social inequality.

Both sociological research methods and social theory were course pre-requisites, and all students enrolled in the three offerings of the seminar to date were junior or senior sociology majors or minors. This analysis is focused on the second and third time the seminar was taught, Fall 2009 and Fall 2011, because during both of those offerings pre- and post-test surveys were administered, the results of which are relevant to this article. The basic patterns outlined here do not differ, however, in the student journal data from the Fall 2007 offering.

In 2009 and 2011, a total of 26 students enrolled in the seminar. Four seminar options are offered each year; thus sociology majors and minors have significant choice in selecting courses to fulfill the department's seminar requirement. As a result, it is not surprising that almost all of the 26 students analyzed in this article were at least interested in, and more often enthusiastic about, community-engagement and publicly-oriented sociology. Bates College is a small, selective liberal arts college in the Northeast, and like most of its peers enrolls a disproportionately white, middle and upper-middle class, east coast student body. Virtually all students are full-time and live on campus. Of the 26 students in the course in the years addressed here, 6 were students of color, and 20 were white; 4 were men, and 22 women.[3]

A brief overview of the readings and assignments in the seminar is essential to understanding the context in which students came to express their perceptions of community partners as sources of knowledge.[4] The basic menu of readings included Strand et al.'s (2003) work on the origins and principles of CBR, as well as a series of readings introducing publicly-engaged sociology and the debates that have followed Burawoy's (2005) advocacy for public sociology. With these claims and debates as context, students produced two major "products." First, with a group of peers, each student worked on a CBR project, with the goal of producing a group final product that met their community partner's needs. Each student also completed an individual seminar project related to the CBR project, with the goal of writing a fairly standard academic research paper on their own. In each offering of the seminar, the instructor worked with the campus' Harward Center for Community Partnerships to develop three or four options for the group CBR project, all of which focused on social inequality/social justice issues in the Lewiston/Auburn community. Across the two offerings explored in this article, topics included food insecurity, economic opportunities for local public housing residents, the digital divide, access to higher education, domestic violence, and after-school programs for low-income youth. Examples of specific CBR projects include completion of a survey of emergency food providers, qualitative interviews with participants in the public housing economic opportunity program, and the development of a survey instrument about college aspirations for later use by an organization advocating for higher education access. Each of these projects culminated in a product designed for the partner. In the three examples, these products were as follows: an executive summary of the emergency food provider survey process and results; an executive summary of themes and a full set of interview transcripts for the public housing project; and a formatted survey instrument with data collection suggestions for the higher education access project. In their more traditionally-academic individual seminar papers, students pursued related but distinct topics that did not necessarily address a partner need. For example, one student working on the public housing project wrote an individual seminar paper focused on how program participants invoke individual and collective responsibility for poverty reduction. Another student, this one working with the higher education access project, pre-tested the survey instrument with a focus group and analyzed the focus group transcript to explore how local residents with college degrees think about access to graduate education in the area.

Most group projects were what Strand et al. (2003) would characterize as "CBR in the middle," which they define as partnering with "groups that might be thought of as one step up from the grassroots," for example "social services organizations, community development corporations, and government agencies" (p. 73). They note advantages to this type of partnership, as these kinds of organizations have "staff and leadership that are easy to identify and contact" (p. 73), but also disadvantages in terms of community needs being interpreted through the lens of professionals rather than through community members directly affected by social inequalities. This is important in relation to the politics of knowledge, as the partners students were being encouraged to recognize as knowledge sources were often professionals. Even so, as reported later, students were frequently drawn back to framing those partners as the recipients of academic knowledge, a tendency that may have been even greater had the partners more often been those directly affected by the social issues being researched.

Qualitative Data

One of the regular assignments for all members of the seminar was a weekly journal entry reflecting on seminar readings, class discussion, and CBR project work. All 26 students who took the seminar in 2009 and 2011 gave permission for their journal entries to be used in this article through a written process of informed consent that met the formal guidelines of Bates College's Institutional Review Board. The instructor made a vigorous effort to explain the purposes of the project thoroughly to students, to assure them that if they preferred not to participate for any reason it would be understood without question, and that if they did participate their confidentiality would be protected. Professorial power may still have shaped responses to this request, but that power was taken very seriously as the informed consent process was explained to students. As junior and senior sociology students, they were well acquainted with research ethics; they seemed genuinely convinced when assured there would be no negative repercussions if they preferred not to participate. In fact, they seemed not only willing but eager to participate, perhaps because they too were researchers collecting data. They knew the instructor would be reading their journal entries either way, so the question was whether they wished to allow the use of those entries as data for a research project too. To maintain confidentiality, students are not identified by name, nor are gender, race/ethnicity or class year indicated for any quotes. Electronic copies of the journals were imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, for coding and analysis.

Several cautionary notes are relevant before addressing the coding process used to identify journal material relevant to the focus of this article. First, though students were encouraged to view the journal as an opportunity to respond to the seminar experience for their own reflection and development of their own thinking, the instructor's role as evaluator of their journal entries surely shaped what they were willing to write. In relation to the particular focus here on perceptions of community partners, in the journal instructions students were encouraged to reflect weekly on "partnership and reciprocity" both within their student CBR group and between themselves and their community partners, including reference to "what you are learning from your community partners and what you are offering to them." As a result of course readings, the instructor's clear advocacy for reciprocally-partnered CBR, and this specific request in the journal instructions, it is safe to assume that any bias in student perceptions is in the direction of overstating their respect and appreciation for their community partners' knowledge. And yet, as the analysis to come clearly demonstrates, there was significant variation in whether and how students viewed their community partners as sources of knowledge rather than as recipients of their academically-based expert knowledge. The distribution of their perceptions should not be generalized, as the positive perceptions of partners are likely overstated. But with that caveat in mind, the data presented here still provide significant evidence about the texture and nuances of student responses to community partners in the context of the politics of knowledge, and shifts over the course of the semester in such responses provide important evidence about the conditions that encourage recognition of partners as sources of knowledge.

The 26 students produced more than 700 pages of journal entries, and for the purposes of this particular article the focus is on just one set of categories that were coded within that text. The approach to coding follows Rubin and Rubin's (2011) guidelines, which emphasize the importance of clear definitions not only of what is included in a given category but what is excluded as well. Narrowing in on the material most relevant to the conceptual distinctions offered in the review of the literature on reciprocity and the politics of knowledge, the first pass was to code all text addressing partnership and reciprocity in relation to specific people. Most of the students wrote often about reciprocity and partnership in the abstract, as principles of CBR that they appreciated and as principles that led them to prioritize research questions that arose from community partner needs. But this particular code focused on references to reciprocity and partnership with specific people: fellow students in their CBR group and community partners (while

excluding discussion of the CBR project that did not specifically address their peers or partners). Within that coded material, sub-codes were created for a focus on student peers versus community partners, and it is within the latter text that further coding identified the particularly relevant set of categories addressed in this article.

The basic distinction made within material focused specifically on partnership and reciprocity with community partners was between (a) any mention of *learning from* their community partners or recognition of those partners *as sources of valuable knowledge*; and (b) references to the relationship with community partners that framed it in a more unidirectional manner, with a focus on community partners as *recipients or beneficiaries of the students' and faculty's academic knowledge*. In the first category, only references that clearly invoked knowledge and learning from partners was coded. Some related but distinct themes excluded were: general references to enjoying the time they spent with their community partners; references to the skills they felt they were building through the process of working with the partners; and general references to how working in the community enriched their research. All of those are interesting themes, but not directly applicable to the politics of knowledge questions that animate this article. The focus in this coding was to identify clear invocations of partners as important sources of community knowledge with whom students were in dialogue as well as clear invocations of those partners as recipients of a more one-way transfer of academic knowledge.

Quantitative Data

A brief survey was also conducted at both the beginning and end of the semester. The goal of this survey was to get a baseline sense of the level of students' interest in CBR and community-engaged learning as well as their interest in learning more about social issues in general and sociology as a discipline in particular, and to tap their beliefs about reciprocal partnerships between higher education institutions and their communities. The survey was administered on the first day of class, before handing out the syllabus or discussing any of the course goals. No students dropped or added the seminar, so despite the fact that the survey was anonymous, responses are available from the same 26 individuals on both the first and last days of class.[5] It was emphasized that the survey was voluntary, that students who preferred not to complete it would not be at any disadvantage, and no questions were asked that would have allowed the identification of individuals. As with the informed consent process for their journal entries, these junior and senior sociology students, most of whom already knew the instructor well,

seemed not only willing but eager to participate.

The survey questions were not directly linked to the specific approach to the politics of knowledge used in coding the qualitative data, and therefore the results of the quantitative analysis should be considered a brief opportunity to compare perceptions at the beginning and end of the semester rather than a source of evidence equal to that provided by the qualitative analysis. But given that the results reveal parallels in what this briefer source of evidence documents, it is a valuable addition. The two relevant survey questions addressed what students have to offer community partners and what partners offer back to them (with the latter element measured in a general manner that references skill-building, rather than in the narrowly defined manner that directly addresses the politics of knowledge, as described for the coding of the qualitative data). These two survey questions were worded as follows, with four-point response scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: "Bates students have a lot to offer to the Lewiston/Auburn community in helping area organizations research and solve local problems" and "Organizations in the Lewiston/Auburn community have a lot to offer to Bates students in helping students build their skills in research, collaboration, and problem solving."

Results: Student Perceptions of Community Partners

Survey Data as Foundation

A brief consideration of responses to the survey questions offers a first peek into how students viewed their relationship with community partners. Most students either agreed or strongly agreed that both students and partners can benefit from such relationships.

Particularly noteworthy is change over the course of the semester, as students came to agree more strongly that *both* students and community partners have a lot to offer each other. At the beginning of the seminar, 46% (*n*=12) of students strongly agreed that Bates students have a lot to offer the community and 39% (*n*=10) strongly agreed that the community has a lot to offer to them. By the end of the seminar, these percentages had both increased, to 62% (*n*=16) and 58% (*n*=15) respectively. Thus students become increasingly likely not only to recognize what partners have to offer, but also increasingly confident in their own contributions as well. As noted previously, this is not a direct measure of the concepts explored in the literature review. The survey questions were framed broadly to capture skills students gain from the process of collaborating with partners, rather than narrowly to capture their recognition of partners as sources of knowledge. But taken together with the more detailed analysis of the qualitative data presented

next, this pattern provides a helpful foundation for the claim that as students explored the readings and spent time with their partners, they became increasingly likely to view both themselves and their partners as having something valuable to offer in a two-way exchange.

Qualitative Data—Community Partners as Knowledge Sources or Co-Creators

Qualitative analysis of student journal entries provides even more compelling evidence for the range and texture of student opinions about community partners, and given the approach utilized in coding, does so in a manner more directly connected to the politics of knowledge. Overall, as seminar participants explored debates that question the hegemonic status of "expert" academic knowledge as conveyed in the scholarly literature and classroom discourse, the relative frequency and the depth with which they wrote about community partners as valuable sources of knowledge increased.[6] As noted earlier, this was surely shaped by the instructor's advocacy for that perspective, but it also indicates that seminar material and assignments that engage questions about the politics of knowledge can encourage students to frame their community partners in new ways. Even if they are doing so in response to an instructor's framing, that process provides some temporary and perhaps even lasting counterweight to the hegemonic prioritization of the application of academic expertise in communities over the equal weighting of academic and community knowledge as contributors to a process of knowledge co-creation.

Breaking the seminar into three time periods, during the first third, about half of the words coded in either of the two categories contrasting community partners as recipients of academic knowledge versus sources of knowledge were in each category. Though not linearly increasing week by week, over time the tendency was toward increasing recognition of community partners as sources of knowledge, parallel to what the survey results suggest. By the middle third of the course, three-fifths of the words generated in those two categories framed community partners as sources of knowledge, and by the final third, that category included three-quarters of the words coded into one of the two categories. Student perceptions of community partners as knowledge sources or co-creators ranged from brief to detailed, and text coded into that category became more detailed (i.e., longer) as the semester progressed. The range of those responses is documented in four categories, beginning with references to (a) learning from partners, and then moving to greater levels of complexity in references to (b) partners and students as mutual learners, then (c) explicit ranking of community part-

ners as more knowledgeable than academic partners, and finally (d) references to co-creation of knowledge. After the presentation of these categories of student perception that frame partners as sources of knowledge, the other side of the coin is explored, references to partners as recipients.

Learning from partners. At the most basic level, almost all students offered brief comments in response to the expectation that they address what they are learning from their partners. Three separate examples convey the kinds of comments coded into this category.

> I have learned a lot from our partners in terms of the social issues and the real need that exists in Lewiston.

> As a student, I am learning a great deal (from my partners) about the opportunities available to low-income individuals as well as the difficulties many community members face when they try to reach their economic goals.

> I have received so much from the people within the community that I have met with, they have all been so…helpful and so knowledgeable. It was great to meet with people who wanted to explain the whole topic (of emergency food provision) to me.

Another student referred to one of the program directors with whom a student CBR group was paired as "yet another knowledgeable partner to help us," and commented on learning a great deal from that partner's "depth of understanding about the challenges of the work and the complexities of what would appear to some outside observers to be a straightforward task—running an after-school program."

As noted previously, most of the seminar partnerships represented "CBR in the middle" (Strand et al., 2003), involving organizations that provide services to low-income or otherwise marginalized populations rather than work conducted directly with those populations. But some of the partner groups included service recipients in their organizational structure, and some of the student CBR groups interacted directly with such recipients even if they were not framed as the partners for the project. Thus a few students wrote about what they learned from such partners, like one student working with low-income clients at a grant-funded public computer lab:

> Just because fate has gifted me with more material advantages than they have received does not mean that they can't offer me help. They do help me. They do teach me…about a life that I haven't lived. Without them, I would remain ignorant.

Partners and students as mutual learners. With similar frequency, almost all of the students invoked

learning something important from community partners coupled with acknowledgement of what partners learn or gain from students and the academic institution. As one student put it, viewing student researchers and their community partners as equal and mutually-reinforcing sources of knowledge:

> For me, one of the valuable benefits from my community-based research is getting researchers and affected communities to exchange in a dialogue where there is a mutual learning process that changes the discussions and dynamics taking place on both levels.

Referring to the goals of their joint CBR project, another student wrote about what the partners were learning from the student review of the scholarly literature and what the students were learning from the partners' accumulated experience: "The literature reviews that we have been doing proved to be very useful…as we brought our academic knowledge to the table, and (our partners) shared knowledge from their firsthand experience with the issue of domestic violence." A similar theme is invoked by another student, in relation to the same partnership with a domestic violence advocacy organization: "We are learning from [the community organization] and we are using our academic expertise to make a noteworthy contribution to the organization."

In an even broader framing of what students and partners were learning from a different partnership, another student noted:

> [The partner organization] has so much to offer to Bates. They have information and resources that students can use to enhance their intellectual capacity, they let students experience working in the real world implementing the knowledge they acquire over the course of their college career. On the other hand Bates can help (the partner organization) in their effort to create economic opportunity by engaging student knowledge and the skills that students have to offer to them.

Explicit ranking of partners as more knowledgeable. In some entries, students explicitly framed community partners as having greater knowledge, as the following two examples demonstrate:

> Since I've been working with [my community partners] …I really feel as if I have become a part of the whole effort—not simply as a temporary helper, but as a member with an actual contribution…I was given an opportunity through this community-based research project, and it was amazing getting to know people with experiences and knowledge far beyond my own.

> The extra academic audience is one that I had not engaged with in a sociological nature until

this seminar. Going to [my partner organizations] helped show me that there is so much knowledge laden within community organizations…I have definitely learned a lot from them…I know that they have left a bigger impression on me than I have on them.

Another student captured this greater knowledge in a journal comment that criticized the way one of our readings encouraged expanding beyond academic expertise, by rejecting the notion that academics even are the experts.

> [Our partners] are the experts—the ones who've dedicated their career to this work—while we're the non-experts—mere students and even professors taking on a class project to study what they do.

In a later entry, the same student expanded on this idea, again comparing academic knowledge and community knowledge in a manner that prioritizes the latter.

> Sometimes I think I've learned more in college *off* campus than on it. This comes from various experiences with diverse people and practical work with organizations that have opened my mind in ways classes never had. What I mean by all this is that the world off campus (the "community," as some might put it) is rich with experiences and people to learn from, and that we shouldn't limit ourselves to knowledge generated within the confines of academia.

When students acknowledge what they learn from community partners, and when they frame themselves and those partners as mutual learners, they are engaging in the politics of knowledge in a manner that expands beyond the hegemony of academic knowledge. But that expansion is even more notable in the less frequent approach of explicitly prioritizing community knowledge as in some ways greater. Only 5 of the 26 students offered a response coded into this category, but those responses are notable as one of the perceptions of community partners that arose in student journals.

Co-creators: Reciprocity in the knowledge-making process. Learning and knowledge creation are, of course, related processes. Thus, even when learning from the partners' knowledge and experience is highlighted without explicit mention of co-creating knowledge, such co-creation is often implicit. But for some students that connection was quite explicit. For example, one student commented on a guest lecturer's argument that people do not "find knowledge" but "make knowledge" in a process to which both academics and community partners contribute.

> I really like this concept, because it helps me

wrap my head around all the things that Strand et al. write about. They write about mutual partnerships where each party is getting something out of working together. By saying that we make knowledge, it helps me see that I can use my knowledge as a (sociology) student, and my community partners can use their knowledge as more long-term members of Lewiston, to create new knowledge that will benefit both of us.

Though all students discussed the idea of co-creation at some point in their journals, because it was a theme in readings and guest lectures, only half of them wrote about it in specific relation to their community partners. Sometimes such reference was brief, as in the case of a student who linked a reading to her own project by stating "I am working closely with my partners, because CBR is a unique opportunity for us to jointly create and disseminate knowledge." Another student expanded on this theme, in describing work with an organization devoted to expanding access to higher education in the local community.

I am learning a lot more about aspirations and barriers to college as well as more about the local community. And I am getting experience in combining knowledge/skills with others, our partners, who have a different knowledge/skill set, to make new knowledge together.

Summed up in the phrase "collaboration with our partners creates knowledge that would not be possible for either (my group) or our partners to think of alone," a student working with organizations advocating for low-income youth also addressed reciprocal knowledge generation.

Acknowledging and celebrating the diverse subcommunities and the different types of knowledge within a community makes for a potentially more valuable community partnership and more dynamic collective community…Our knowledge as students and our community partner's knowledge and their youth program participants' knowledge (are) all relevant and equally valuable. Thus we allow ourselves to recognize the different types of knowledge that communities possess, and together (produce better research) through the approach and process of CBR.

Qualitative Data—Partners as Recipients of Academic Knowledge and Assistance

As noted, text acknowledging community partners as sources of knowledge was more frequent than text framing partners as recipients of academic knowledge. And when the latter was evident, it was often simply a matter of recognizing both academics and partners as important contributors, as in some of the references to mutual learning presented previously. But especially earlier in the seminar, some references were critical of partners or focused notably more on what partners stand to gain from student expertise than on what students may gain from partners. These examples are offered not to criticize the seminar students, but to highlight the politics of knowledge that, unless challenged explicitly, can potentially foreground student contributions without simultaneously acknowledging the deep knowledge and experience of partners, and the reciprocal benefits students, faculty, and higher education institutions receive from community partnerships.

In a few cases, students expressed frustration with their partners' work. With longer exposure that frustration might have proved justified, but a few students were quick to express it in a manner that implicitly downplayed their partners' accumulated expertise and emphasized their own judgment from brief exposure instead.[7] A few students also felt that their partners gained significantly more from the CBR process than they did, an implicit suggestion that they did not learn from those partners in a meaningful way that balanced the value of the research they offered. For example, one student noted, "I don't think the benefit to me was as great as the benefit to our partner." Another drew the same conclusion, for a different CBR project: "I believe the people that will ultimately best benefit from our CBR project are (the partners)…I don't really feel like I am gaining too much."

More often, material coded as framing partners as recipients of academic knowledge was positive, with students expressing enthusiasm for what they were able to offer. For example, one student wrote:

As field researchers, we are able to look at the situation from a different perspective than those already immersed in the program and how it is running…From a totally neutral view we can provide (our partner) with what we see as advantages and disadvantages of the existing program and how it might be turned around.

Other students also focused on transferring academic knowledge into the community. One noted, in relation to their specific project, that the value of CBR is the way it lets academics "open up the pathways of knowledge to the greater community by teaching them for future projects, offering the education necessary (for them) to do it independently." Another put it this way:

After reading the scholarly literature (on education and race and poverty), I was depressed seeing the abundance of problems produced by the hierarchies of race and income. But at the same time, in (my CBR project), I expect as a sociol-

ogist to share this information with the general public—who I hope can take this matter into their own hands to start implementing social change.

A variation on this more unidirectional but positive framing was an emphasis on helping through CBR, in responses that focused strongly on what the partners gained, like these two examples.

> It also felt good to be a Bates student out in the community, actually doing something that was needed, and that was really appreciated…There is a real need from the community that we are trying to answer through sociological public engagement, and the benefit is to the community members.

> Bates College does a great job with placing students in the community and helping with 'town-gown' relations. Although they might think that we're totally separate from them, the second we enter an organization to help, I think these thoughts immediately diminish. They can actually see that Bates students are there to help and aren't just focused on themselves.

Discussion and Conclusion

By addressing enthusiasm for knowledge transfer into the community and the opportunity to help partners, these quotes and others like them convey a commitment to the public good that resonates with the goals of community engagement in general and CBR in particular. Students' admirable commitment to contributing to local communities through their research was strongly evident each time the seminar was offered. But perceptions of partners as recipients of academic knowledge, even though outweighed by recognition of partners as sources of knowledge as well, remind one of the work that remains for community-engaged learning advocates if they seek to disrupt the politics of knowledge that are increasingly criticized by scholars such as those discussed in this article's literature review. The frequency and content of student perceptions that validate partner knowledge, and the increase in such perceptions over the course of the semester, suggest that course content intentionally and critically addressing the discourse of expert knowledge can encourage students to expand their recognition not only of what the academy offers to its broader communities, but what community partners contribute to the academy. At the same time, the persistence of some invocation of partners as recipients of expert knowledge and other unidirectional framings suggests that encouraging such recognition requires consistent and intentional exploration of the politics of knowledge. And the four categories of such recognition identified here,

moving from simple invocations of learning from partners to deeper attention to co-creation of knowledge and reciprocity, suggest the levels students should be encouraged to consider as they attend to the politics of knowledge.

One resource for this kind of recognition and exploration is, of course, faculty and staff commitment to directly addressing the politics of knowledge in community-engaged courses. Another critical resource is the kind of institutional infrastructure that broadens commitment beyond the individual course or faculty member, lending institutional legitimacy to critical engagement with the politics of knowledge. Hoyt (2011) refers to this kind of knowledge-generation as "authentic engagement," in which the community is "no longer simply a lab under a microscope" (which she calls "pseudo-engagement"), but rather a "living partnership between a university and a city for the purpose of reciprocal knowledge" (p. 277). She argues that one of the conditions allowing for authentic engagement is a set of "institutional conditions"—reward structures for students and faculty, administrative and financial support for authentically engaged research, and a sustained institutional commitment to partnership. As Strand et al. (2003) argue, individual faculty and staff members can and do execute meaningful CBR projects, but doing so is all the more efficient, feasible, and impactful if that work is coordinated and resourced through institutional structures like, in the case of Bates College, the Harward Center for Community Partnerships. According to Strand et al. (2003, p. 171-172), such centers mobilize resources, build relationships, maximize efficiency through the division of labor, manage information, establish control mechanisms for research, manage external relationships, and foster sustainability. By enabling those outcomes, successful centers promote the core principles of CBR: "collaboration, demystification of knowledge and its construction, and social change advocacy" (p. 196). As Stoecker and Beckman (2009) note, if academics wish to shift away from designing community engagement on a course-by-course basis determined by the needs of the instructor, toward a model that "start(s) by asking what issues exist in the community", the process must begin by "build(ing) the community relationships on which we can design a community-based (learning) strategy" (p. 4). They go on to assert that "the true potential of an effective project can only be realized when it is part of a longer term strategy" (p. 6), and the kind of coordination that comes from adequately resourced institution-wide commitment is key to such a strategy.

This analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from the Public Sociology seminar raises at least as many questions as it answers. This article has

focused at the course level, exploring patterns in student perceptions of community partners in the aggregate. The available data are not sufficient to analyze individual student-level variations in such perceptions. But even a cursory first-pass at the student-level is suggestive of new questions. Just as the balance of comments framing partners as sources of and recipients of knowledge varied across time, it varied across students as well. Formal data on students' level of commitment and experience with community engagement were not collected. But in scanning the list of students for whom the balance of mentions tilted most pointedly toward perceiving community partners as sources of knowledge, what is striking is the depth and time horizon of their previous commitment to community-engaged learning, including the level of their connection with the campus' Harward Center for Community Partnerships. Through co-curricular programming and leadership development work, as well as through modeling what Hoyt (2011) calls authentic engagement, the Harward Center provides excellent resources for encouraging reciprocity in the knowledge-making process. The students for whom recognition of partners as sources of knowledge was most evident were not, during the seminar, generally partnered with organizations with whom they had worked previously, so it is not prior experience with those particular partners that seems to set them apart. Rather, it is sustained practice of community engagement, including participation in other courses and in programming supported by the Harward Center, that stands out. Though not conclusive given the data gathered, this connection suggests an intriguing avenue for future research.

In addition, given the limited number of partnerships in the two offerings of the course (seven distinct partnerships), it is difficult to determine whether student perceptions might vary by the type of partnership or the characteristics of the individuals with whom they worked. For example, some partner organizations were led by individuals with connections to Bates College, either as alumni or former staff and instructors. Some partner organizations worked at a distance from the marginalized community members they serve while others included such community members in central roles. There was also variation in whether partners were government agencies, social services organizations, or more activist-oriented groups. It would be helpful to assess whether and how student perceptions of partners as sources of knowledge vary by partner type across these dimensions and many others.

Another fruitful question for future research is how partners themselves perceive the politics of knowledge in the CBR process. Do they feel recognized for their knowledge, and does such perceived recognition vary by partner characteristics? How do they perceive student, faculty and staff knowledge among their academic partners, and how do such perceptions vary by characteristics of those academic partners? And how do community partners view the potential for co-creation of knowledge between the academy and its communities?

With such questions left for future research, this article closes by returning to the focus of the analysis: student perceptions of community partners and the politics of knowledge. The potential that can be unleashed by courses critically analyzing the politics of knowledge, when combined with the support of a well-resourced community partnership center and thoughtful, authentic engagement between academic and community partners, is captured well in what one of the students wrote in the final journal entry of the seminar.

> Where we choose to *recognize* opportunity and knowledge is not a statement of where opportunity and knowledge *actually exist*, but a reflection of more dominant and hegemonic values of society. I think that this is something that I have definitely taken away from this seminar…I realize (better) the difference that I can make in my own back yard alongside community partners through social change that depends precisely on the different types of knowledge that both community partners and I bring to the table due to our different experiences.

Notes

[1] See Sigmon (1977) for a classic early statement relevant to this approach. He argued for viewing "all the active partners in a service-learning experience as learners. Not only the student, but also the faculty counselor, the agency or community supervisor, and those being served. This expectation strongly suggests that mutuality is an important dimension in learning (page 10)."

[2] Burawoy's call has generated an array of debate and discussion among sociologists, chronicled in special issues of journals like *Critical Sociology, Social Forces, and Social Problems*, as well as edited collections such as Clawson et. al.'s (2007) *Public Sociology*, Nichols' (2007) *Public Sociology: The Contemporary Debate*, and Jeffries' (2009) *Handbook of Public Sociology*.

[3] Bates College sociology majors and minors are disproportionately women, but not as strongly so as the gender distribution in this seminar would suggest. Female sociology majors and minors at Bates are more likely to be focused on social inequalities, which were central to the topic of this seminar, while male majors and minors are more likely to select courses focused on other areas of the department. Given the range of seminars from which students could select, it is likely for this reason that more women selected this particular seminar.

[4] For additional details regarding the seminar's content, assignments, and specific CBR projects completed, see Kane (2011) or contact the author directly.

[5] It would have been preferable to include some identifying code on the pre- and post-test surveys, to allow for individual student comparisons over time. In addition, as noted in the conclusion to this article, additional data about student characteristics would have been very useful to further analysis.

[6] It is beyond the scope of this article to address how students viewed their own contributions and knowledge in the qualitative data, but given the literature on the positive impact of community-based learning on students' capacities (e.g., Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Zlotkowski & Duffy, 2010) and the quantitative results showing increased student agreement that they have much to offer to the community, this would be an interesting topic for future analysis.

[7] Quotes are not included to support this pattern because it was rare, and any quotes offered could too easily identify students or organizations.

References

Bacon, N. (2002). Differences in faculty and community partners' theories of learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *9*(1), 34-44.

Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professorate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Endowment for the Advancement of Teaching.

Bucher, J. (2012). Old and young dogs teaching each other tricks: The importance of developing agency for community partners in community learning. *Teaching Sociology*, *40*(3), 271-283.

Burawoy, M. (2005). For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, *70*(1), 4-28.

Clawson, D., Zussman, R., Misra, J., Gerstel, N., Stokes, R., Anderton, D., & Burawoy, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Public sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Conway, J. M., Amel, E. L., & Gerwien, D. P. (2009). Teaching and learning in the social context: A meta-analysis of service-learning's effects on academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology*, *36*, 233-245.

d'Arlach, L., Sanchez, B., & Feuer, R. (2009). Voices from the community: A case for reciprocity. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *16*(1), 5-16.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Hartley, M. & Saltmarsh, J. (2011). Conclusion: Creating the democratically engaged university. In J. Saltmarsh & M. Hartley (Eds.), *To serve a larger purpose: Engagement for democracy and the transformation of higher education* (pp. 289-300). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hoyt, L. (2011). Sustained city-campus engagement. In J. Saltmarsh and M. Hartley (Eds.), *To serve a larger purpose: Engagement for democracy and the transformation of higher education* (pp. 265-88). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Jeffries, V. (2009). *Handbook of public sociology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Kane, E. W. (2011, February). Community-based research as a tool for thinking critically about the discipline and advancing public sociology. Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.

Kellogg Commission. (1999). *Returning to our roots: The engaged institution*. Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

Mitchell, T. D. (2008). Traditional vs. critical service-learning: Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *14*(2), 50-65.

Mooney, L. A. & Edwards, B. (2001). Experiential learning in sociology: Service learning and other community-based learning initiatives. *Teaching Sociology*, *29*(2), 181-194.

National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement. (2012). *A crucible moment: College learning and democracy's future*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Nichols, L. T. (2007). *Public sociology: The contemporary debate*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Saltmarsh, J. & Hartley, M. (2011). To serve a larger purpose. In J. Saltmarsh & M. Hartley (Eds.), *To serve a larger purpose: Engagement for democracy and the transformation of higher education* (pp. 1-13). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Saltmarsh, J. & Zlotkowski, E. (2011). Putting into practice the civic purposes of higher education. In J. Saltmarsh and E. Zlotkowski (Eds.), *Higher education and democracy: Essays on service learning and civic engagement* (pp. 1-8). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

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.

Scobey, D. (2010). Across: The heterogeneity of civic education. In M. B. Smith, R. S. Nowacek, & J. L. Bernstein (Eds.), *Citizenship across the curriculum* (pp. 185-198). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Sigmon, R. (1979). Service learning: Three principles. *Synergist*, *8*(1), 9-11.

Stoecker, R. & Beckman, M. (2009). Making higher education civic engagement matter in the community. Campus Compact Working Paper, http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/engagement-proof-1.pdf.

Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., & Donohue. P. (2003). *Community-based research and higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Vogelgesang, L. & Astin, A. (2000). Comparing the effects of community service and service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *7*(1), 25-34.

Zlotkowski, E. & Duffy, D. (2010). Two decades of community-based learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *123*, 33-43.

Author

EMILY W. KANE (ekane@bates.edu) is professor of Sociology at Bates College and also serves in the Women and Gender Studies Program. She teaches courses on gender, family, childhood, social inequality, research methods for sociology, public sociology, and community-based research. Her scholarship has focused on beliefs about social inequality in the United States and cross-nationally; gender and parenting; and most recently, student responses to community-engaged learning.