# Service-Learning Partnerships: Paths of Engagement

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*This article furthers research and theory on the initiation and development of service-learning partnerships. It identifies three paths of engagement between university and community agencies: tentative engagement, aligned engagement, and committed engagement. This conceptualization helps to understand how service-learning partnerships evolve over time. It also helps to capture the diversity among service-learning partnerships. The research builds on 27 interviews with participants in 13 service-learning partnerships involving institutions of higher education in New England.*

**R**eciprocity between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and community has been espoused as a core principle of good practice in service-learning since its inception (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Sigmon, 1979). As the field has matured, the focus on community-campus partnerships has emerged as both a vehicle for actually conducting service-learning and a way to study the effectiveness of service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Indeed the current view appears to be that service-learning and partnerships are inextricably linked. Jacoby (2003) asserts, "... service-learning must be grounded in a network, or web, of authentic, democratic, reciprocal partnerships" (p. 6). The case is stated more forceful by Bailis (2000), who argues, "service-learning and partnerships are two sides of the same coin" (p. 5).

The paucity of empirical literature supports the case that community partnerships are only beginning to be understood and should be studied both in terms of process and outcome (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Clarke, 2003). Giles and Eyler (1998) have argued that understanding community impacts of service-learning is one of the top ten unanswered questions in service-learning research. A review of the empirical literature from 1993-2000 on the effects of service-learning on various constituencies (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001) shows that the topic of community is the least researched area in service-learning. Cruz and Giles (2000) analyze the reason for this paucity of empirical interest in the community dimensions of service-learning; they conclude that the only manageable and feasible way to study the community aspects of service-learning is to use the community-campus partnerships as unit of analysis. As Gelmon (2003) contends, "Assessment of both the processes and impacts of community-university partnership for service-learning is essential to determine the extent to which benefits are derived for both partners" (p.

61). Clarke's model of evaluating community-campus partnerships is a pioneer example of this approach.

In the organization studies literature, there is a rich body of work on collaborative arrangements between organizations with diverse missions (Brown, 1991; Brown & Ashman, 1996; Gray, 1985, 1989; Kaleongakar & Brown, 2000; Westley & Vredenburg, 1991, 1997; Wood & Gray, 1991). As in service-learning partnerships, the defining characteristic of these arrangements is that they bring together individuals who belong to different worlds (Fleck, 1979; Dougherty, 1992). Bringle, Games, and Malloy (1999) provide a good illustration of this difference as "Academicians [who] view knowledge as residing in specialized experts, including disciplinary peers who are geographically dispersed and community residents [who] view knowledge as being pluralistic and well distributed among their neighbors" (pp. 9-10). Most of this work has its theoretical underpinnings on Strauss' negotiated order perspective (see Maines, 1982; Strauss 1978; Strauss, Bucher, Ehrlich, & Satshim, 1963). Negotiated order is a metaphor used to explain that individual and group relations to one another change as they "continually make adjustments to the situations in which they find themselves" (Fine, 1984, p. 243). In this article, the authors embrace this tradition because it permits us to consider simultaneously that (a) partnerships occur between individuals and vary over time in not-linear ways and that (b) they are mediated by institutional factors.

The article furthers research and theory on the creation and development of service-learning partnerships (see Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Enos & Morton, 2003; Giles & Eyler, 1998). It suggests service-learning partnerships follow paths of engagement that vary over time. Instead of stages or levels, such as the

four levels of trust described by Sockett (1998), these paths of engagement vary depending on structural factors framing the partnerships, such as the mission of the organizations and the closeness gained by the parties over time (Bringle & Hatcher). Specifically, this qualitative analysis suggests the following three proposals.

(1) Service-learning partnerships can be traveling on at least three qualitatively different paths that the authors have labeled tentative, aligned, and committed. Partnerships in a tentative engagement are likely to be brand new and involve instructors and/or community agencies inexperienced with service-learning. Partnerships in an aligned engagement are those that have successfully traveled the tentative path and whose members are actively engaged in improving to better fit the needs of students and communities. Partnerships in a committed engagement are characterized by their parties' commitment to the partnership beyond a particular project.

(2) There is a connection between the age of a partnership and the commitment to its success shown by its members. But this connection is mediated by institutional factors.

(3) Community partners are more prone than IHEs partners to entertain behaviors that denote commitment to a service-learning partnership beyond its foundational service-learning project. This is because community partners are more likely than their IHEs counterparts to perceive service-learning partnerships serving the mission of their organizations beyond a specific service-learning project.

The article builds on research on 27 service-learning partnerships in New England. The authors collected surveys from all participants in these partnerships and conducted 27 interviews with participants in 13 of these partnerships. The model presented in this paper builds exclusively on the interviews and was developed through rigorous grounded theory analysis of the interviews conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## Literature Review

The emphasis on community partnerships in the service-learning literature is both relatively new and quite sparse. While there has been some emphasis on the community impacts of service-learning in the research literature, a focus on the partnerships themselves is new. The most comprehensive statement of this approach is found in *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning*, by Barbara Jacoby and Associates (2003). Some of the few studies that looked at partnerships without focusing on them as the unit of analysis include Bacon's (2002) comparison of faculty and community partners' different views of learning, and Schmidt and Robby's (2002) study of the benefits of service-learning to the community. Similarly, Jorge (2003) looked at benefits for community partners in "an unmediated service-learning program," meaning that the partners were the direct community recipients of the services and not agency or public school partners. Using IHEs as the unit of analysis and a case study approach, Maurrasse (2001) studied four 'community partnerships' to address the question of the fit between these partnerships and the missions of different types of IHEs. This study did not address the relationship dynamics or the process within the partnerships themselves. Similarly Jones (2003) examined profiles of four "exemplary partnerships with community agencies," using a case study approach with the focus on the IHEs and the community agencies as organizations.

This study builds theoretically on negotiated order (Strauss, 1978). This framework is advantageous because it permits considering the multi-level factors that affect partnerships and their variation over time. Negotiated order theory suggests that partnerships should be studied considering not only the outcomes of the relationship for the parties but also the context in which actors' actions and interactions are embedded. This perspective has a long tradition in the organization studies field and has been applied to the study of cooperative links around complex environmental problems (Westley & Vredenburg, 1991, 1997), refugee programs (Hardy & Phillips, 1998; Lawrence & Hardy, 1999), urban problems and policy challenges (Gray, 1989), and development (Brown, 1991; Brown & Ashman, 1996).

In the service-learning literature, this study connects to an emerging body of work that places partnerships as the central unit of analysis. The authors find our antecedents in the theoretical reflections brought forward by Bringle and Hatcher (2002) and Enos and Morton (2003). Bringle and Hatcher provided an insightful analysis of service-learning partnerships building on its parallels with interpersonal exchanges. We borrowed from them the term "engagement," which we expand and redefine. Enos and Morton theorize partnership development to move from transactional to transformative. We did not test this theory but see parallels between the paths of engagement and the move toward transformative partnerships. In both cases the partnership takes on meaning beyond the transactions of

the specific service-learning projects.

In the empirical literature, Clarke (2003) developed and piloted a model to evaluate the impacts of a community partnership in service-learning. The scope of the partnership was the local neighborhood of the campus that had formed a partnership with several service-learning classes. Using a process model to study impacts Clarke concluded, "...the pilot demonstrated the 3-'I' model's capacity to capture the establishment and development of partnership..." (p. 144). Similarly, Bell-Elkins' (2002) study also adopts a partnership unit of analysis. The study focuses on a campus-community partnership (but not a service-learning partnership). Using 10 years of historical data and interviews and observations, Bell-Elkins concludes that the success of partnerships relates to the sense of ownership by the community over time. Our analysis furthers the work of these two studies by considering differences in the level of attachment to service-learning partnerships by university and community participants.

## Methodology

The evidence for this article derives from 27 interviews with participants in 13 service-learning partnerships involving institutions of higher education (IHEs) in New England. It is part of a broader research project directed to improve understanding of service-learning partnerships.

### Data Collection

Data collection for this project began in April 2002 and extended for about one and a half years. The process was laborious involving a multi-stage approach. In the first stage, the authors were concerned with developing a database that eventually included more than 150 individuals involved in service-learning in about 125 IHEs, 100 of them in New England. We built this database using multiple sources including participant lists from service-learning workshops, Google searches in University web sites, and personal references. We also had help from state representatives of Campus Compact. This database was revised throughout the data collection process.

The second stage involved surveying participants in these partnerships. Considering the difficulties involved in analyzing empirically, as far as we know for the first time, a multi-institutional sample of service-learning partnerships, the authors set quite restrictive conditions on the partnerships that would be included in our sample. Our goal was to draw a sample of partnerships that would be comparable, while still providing enough richness to

further our knowledge on partnership formation. We set three criteria. The first criterion was that partnerships should have been minimally successful. We equated success with evidence that participants had willingly continued in the partnership and limited our sample to partnerships that had lasted more than two semesters—participants had been willing to re-engage at least once. The second criterion was that most external observers should agree that the partnerships qualified as service-learning. We fulfilled this condition by considering only those partnerships providing the social infrastructure to service-learning projects that were a major part of a curriculum course. The last criterion responded to a purely logistical concern: the information collected will be richer and more reliable if it derived from recent partnerships. Accordingly we considered as suitable only those partnerships that had occurred in the last 18 months.

We completed this stage in about six months, between April and September 2002. At the end of this period, we had gathered preliminary information on 57 partnerships and had received 99 properly completed questionnaires. From these 99 questionnaires, 74 belonged to partnerships for which we had completed questionnaires either from all the partners or, at least, from all IHEs participants and one of the community partners involved.

The last stage involved in-depth interviews with 27 individuals involved in 13 of these partnerships. Interviews lasted around one and half hours and were done at the interviewee's workplace. We followed a predefined protocol of questions. Appendix A includes a summarized version of this protocol. The individuals selected and the total number of interviews to be conducted was defined following grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, the sample needs to include enough interviews to permit saturation of categories, meaning the information deriving from interviews shows repetition. Second, the sample should include the highest level of variance possible. We selected to interview a balanced number of instructors, service-learning coordinators, and community representatives. The interviews also included all possible categories of IHEs, such as community colleges, large public universities, comprehensive universities, elite private colleges, and doctoral/research universities. Finally, the sample included a broad range of community participants including schoolteachers, directors of agencies, volunteer coordinators, individuals associated with religious institutions, public servants, etc. We fulfilled these two conditions with the 27 interviews conducted. Hence, the number of interviews and profile of interviewees provides an ade-

quate springboard to define hypothesis to be tested in future studies.

This article reports exclusively on the information derived from the interviews. The authors hope to publish results deriving from the survey in the future.

*Data Analysis*

The authors followed a grounded theory methodology to analyze the information collected through the interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This section details the specific steps involved in the process.

First, we developed the baseline information building on a reduced-but-representative sample of 10 interviews. This sample included three interviews with faculty, three with service-learning coordinators, and four with community participants. Consistent with grounded theory, these interviews were selected based on the interviewer's opinion as to which interviews brought the most variance in terms of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This first step involved two coders: one of the authors and a graduate student. Each coder developed one memo for each of the 10 interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These memos were done in the form of a table that detailed codes accompanied by an interview quote representative of the code and an identification tag to permit back and forth reference between interviews and codes. These interviews were then jointly analyzed in meetings including both authors and the graduate student. As suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995), in these meetings we used basic questions—who, what, when, how, why—to identify patterns or common themes running across these interviews. Building on these meetings the graduate student developed new tables that consolidated and reorganized the information deriving from the initial memos according to these basic questions. One of the authors and another graduate student revised and refined these tables. The resulting tables deriving from this revision provided baseline information we analyzed in relation with state-of-the-art knowledge on service-learning and partnerships. Further analysis involved specific questions deriving from theoretical concerns.

This article builds on the results of this process, focusing on the questions when and how. These memos/tables grouped interviewees' comments regarding sequence of events and elements that supported the development or progression of the partnerships over time. These tables were analyzed by the authors considering current research on service-learning partnerships. In these coding meetings we developed several iterations of a coding "sheet," which finally resulted in the coding system used in the analysis.

This coding system considered that partnerships and the information about the evolution provided by interviewees clustered around three broad behaviors: learning, aligning, and nurturing. With the help of a Thesaurus we identified synonyms for these terms and defined a coding sheet (see Table 1). We then tested the coding in three interviews. Specifically, the two authors coded these interviews independently and used the results to refine and modify the coding sheet. Two graduate students and one of the authors then used this modified and final coding sheet and coded all 27 interviews. There was a high degree of overlap between the three, and differences were easily solved by consensus.

Appendix B includes a detailed frequency count of learning, aligning, and nurturing behaviors. This frequency count was established by counting the paragraphs in which one particular behavior was described. In addition, when several consecutive paragraphs discussed the same issue we considered them as one single count. The numbers deriving from this frequency count are valuable only as illustrations of relevance or, at least, vividness in interviewees' minds.

We analyzed the results from the coding, in connection to descriptive characteristics about the partnerships. There are multiple characteristics we could have considered in the analysis, such as the level of engagement of students, the length of their participation, whether the IHE was private or public, suburban, rural, or urban, and whether they included different instructors at different times.[1] Our selection of characteristics was limited to factors that have been suggested in the literature as particularly reflective of the quality of partnerships and those emerging directly from our analysis. The first characteristic we considered was the age of the partnership. In principle, following Bringle and Hatcher (2002) we expected older partnerships to be engaged in nurturing behaviors and newer ones in learning ones. Second, as suggested by Enos and Morton (2003) we considered institutionalization of service-learning in IHEs. We assumed that partnerships involving IHEs where service-learning was established would result in a higher likelihood of their including interviewees discussing nurturing behaviors. Finally, we also considered community partners' familiarity with service-learning, or as a minimum their familiarity in working with volunteers. Even if community agencies were inexperienced with service-learning, we believed that the community's familiarity in working with volunteers would help them travel faster on the learning and aligning intensive paths and hence produce a higher proportion of nurturing behaviors. This last category emerged directly from our analysis.

# Findings

This section presents the results from our analysis in view of the behaviors (learning, aligning, nurturing) that emerged as dominant in a partnership, and the basic characteristics of this partnership. A behavior was considered dominant when the comments of all interviewees consistently showed preference for this behaviour. Only 2 of the 13 partnerships showed inconsistency among the answers provided by the different parties (see Appendix B).

Our coding produced three categories of behaviors (actions and interactions) that clustered together: learning, aligning, and nurturing. Learning behaviors involved exchanges leading to gaining familiarity with the other parties. Aligning behaviors

Table 1
*Coding Table*

| Codes | Illustrations |
| --- | --- |
| *Learning* includes actions and interactions that can be described using the following verbs: find out, identify, discover, realize, ascertain, gather, perceive, understand, or related synonyms. | Brainstorm: "So in brainstorming with her she kind of offered me some options of what the students could do." (F7, 6*)<br><br>Identify the partner: "we had to think through our community partnerships and our goal from the beginning was to have a small number of much more intensive partnerships." (S11, 15) |
| These verbs may be used on relation to a person, whether identifying or getting to know that person, or to specific knowledge, e.g. learning what is service-learning. | Understand: "Well when the call had come in, my first question was, whose homes we would be working on?" (C5, 8)<br><br>Discover: "I had no idea. I went oh yeah, volunteers great, sure. No idea what my goals were, what I wanted to get out of it. So that was a challenge for me." (C3, 108) |
| *Aligning* involves actions and interactions that can be described using the following verbs: review, consider or reconsider, examine or re-examine, assess or re-assess, go over, check, evaluate, or related synonyms. | Assess: "I met with [him] once after the end of the summer. You know, he had asked me to, alright, think of what went right, what went wrong, let's sit down and talk about it." (C3, 54)<br><br>Review: "I would say this year there has been a little bit more of an active role in fact in coming out with some good projects for our students to work with." (S13, 39)<br><br>Re-examine: "On the first year there was a lot of negotiation as to what this was going to be." (F8, 106) |
| *Nurturing* involves actions and interactions that can be described using the following verbs: nurture, cultivate, cherish, develop, support, encourage, defend, or related synonyms. | Support: "I mentioned that at one point I was interested in city planning. Just mentioned it off-hand. She called like a few weeks later and said we have this guest professor in town and he's a city planner and I thought you might want to hear him talk. I thought, wow, that's just impressive that an off-hand comment that I make is something that you pick up on, and not only do you pick up on it, but you register it enough that you give me a call and invite me to something." (C4, 70)<br><br>Cherish: "I just like that process of watching students change their minds or change their preconceived notions about the different communities that come together in this place." (C10, 127)<br><br>Cherish: "see my basic goal was to break down some of the barriers between kind of the white suburban and the more mixed city. That was really my, because my area is race, class and gender. So I was like okay, what do I do here? And I feel very very good about the impact that it has had." (F1, 20) |

(*) This letter-number code is the interview identifier. Note that C stands for community partner, S for service-learning coordinator, and F for faculty member.

Table 2
*Characteristics of Partnerships*

|   | Path of engagement | Lasted less/ more than 5 semesters | Institutionalization of service-learning in the IHE | Community partner familiar with SL | Community works with volunteers regularly |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Nurturing | Less | Not established | Familiar | No |
| 2 | Nurturing | More | Well established | Unfamiliar | No |
| 3 | Adjusting | Less | Becoming established | Unfamiliar | Yes |
| 4 | Learning | Less | Well established | Unfamiliar | Yes |
| 5 | Nurturing | Less | Well established | Unfamiliar | No |
| 6 | Learning | Less | Well established | Unfamiliar | Yes |
| 7 | Nurturing | More | Well established | Familiar | No |
| 8 | Adjusting | More | Not established | Unfamiliar | Yes |
| 9 | Nurturing | More | Well established | Familiar | No |
| 10 | Inconsistent | Less | Well established | Unfamiliar | Yes |
| 11 | Inconsistent | More | Well established | Familiar | No |
| 12 | Learning | Less | Becoming established | Unfamiliar | No |
| 13 | Learning | Less | Becoming established | Unfamiliar | Yes |

included assessments, revisions, and all actions and interactions directed to improve the working relation among the partners. Finally, nurturing behaviors included actions and interactions that involve supporting, developing, defending, and expanding the partnership beyond the initial service-learning project. Depending on the dominant behaviors reported by interviewees as present in their partnerships, whether learning, aligning, or nurturing, we considered that partnerships were in tentative, aligned, or committed paths of engagement respectively. Table 2 presents the aggregate results from the coding, in comparison to the basic characteristics of the partnerships previously identified.

*Tentative Path of Engagement*

Partnerships are in a tentative engagement path when learning behaviors are dominant. Learning behaviors may occur at any point in the life of a partnership but they will dominate partnerships that are not established, thus the label of tentative.

Four of the 13 partnerships studied were in a tentative path (see Table 2). These partnerships were all rather young, i.e., had lasted less than five semesters, and they all included community partners with little experience in service-learning. Two of them involved IHEs where service-learning was well established while, in the other two, service-learning was in the process of becoming established. Another aspect that emerged as relevant was whether community agencies, even if unfamiliar with service-learning, had experience working with volunteers. Two of the partnerships included community agencies were highly experienced in working with volunteers.

Considering these results our analysis confirms the Bringle and Hatcher (2002) hypothesis suggesting

that a partnership's age helps to understand its stage of development. Nevertheless, our analysis indicates that some service-learning partnerships may remain on a tentative path throughout their life. As suggested by Bringle and Hatcher, these partnerships may be those destined to fail because partners did not build mutually-satisfying relations. The methodology followed in this study, however, made it impossible to further explore this explanation. These partnerships were simply quite unlikely to be included in our study considering the selection criteria skewed our sample toward successful partnerships.

Our negotiated order approach, however, helped to unveil another explanation as to why partnerships may remain in a tentative path: parties are simply not interested in building a sustainable relationship because of institutional reasons. In these cases, service-learning projects are established ad hoc and the identity of the parties involved is irrelevant. Partners change from one semester to another and the partnership is continually redefined. For example, our sample included one partnership around a communication course. The service-learning project was limited to students doing what the agency needed (e.g., serving soup), the learning derived from students talking with people they would not normally talk to, and the service was being an extra pair of hands to help deliver services. In this case, the instructor was working with a portfolio of agencies and the agency had many sources of volunteers. Who the community was, for the IHE, was not crucial. For the agency it was actually irrelevant whether or not the volunteers helping were working there as part of a service-learning project. Accordingly, in this partnership there was little loyalty and little investment from the parties in moving beyond

learning about one another or identifying other ways of working together.

### Aligned Path of Engagement

Behaviors connected with aligning include any negotiation or process in which the partners seek to create a better fit between their goals. Aligning exchanges involved discussions directed to assess the service-learning partnership and modify it as needed.

Two of the 13 partnerships studied were traveling this aligned path. Both partnerships were quite young, and involved a community partner who was unfamiliar with service-learning. Regarding the IHEs, one of them involved an institution in which service-learning was institutionalizing, in parallel with the evolution of the partnership. The other one involved an IHE in which service-learning was not established. In both cases, the community partners were quite familiar with service-learning.

That only two partnerships were traveling this path may be the result of our sampling criteria—future research would have to confirm this. But their reduced number may also be an indication of the transitory or brief duration of this path. This second explanation is backed by two-thirds of the interviews including references to aligning. This large proportion suggests that these behaviors were relevant in most partnerships. Nevertheless, aligning comments had the lowest total frequency, only 24% of the paragraphs identified referred to aligning behaviors (see Appendix B). One argument that explains both their commonality and low frequency is that aligned paths are short-lived. Those partnerships that do transition between tentative and committed do it rather quickly, perhaps after a few meetings that clarify expectations and adjust the service-learning project.

Finally, the experience of one of the two partnerships that was dominantly aligning suggests a complementary explanation. This partnership was characterized by what all parties described as a bad start. The first engagement had multiple problems. For example, the community partner did not have clear expectations and was unhappy with student accountability issues. In turn, students were disappointed because their projects had less impact than they had expected. Nevertheless, both sides were willing to try again. According to the community participant: "I knew it was a new program for them, it was a new thing for me and you know I absolutely want to give things the benefit of the doubt" (EM52).

The two sides then engaged in an aligning path. They worked together to solve their initial problems, clarifying expectations and defining a process of interaction to help prevent the previous problems.

In short, once again, age of the relationship emerges as explaining the type of relation that defines service-learning partnerships. As mentioned before, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) had suggested as much. In addition, building on work on the development of close relationships (Arriaga, 2001; Surra, 1987), they had also suggested that relationships advance at different speeds. Our research further refines this second insight. It suggests that service-learning partnerships are likely to either stagnate at the tentative path or advance rather quickly into a committed one; time spent in the aligning path is likely to be rather limited.

### Committed Path of Engagement

The committed stage engagement is defined by exchanges involving actions and interactions that denote that partners value the partnership beyond the departing project. Transition to this stage requires partners to believe that the partnership should be protected, extended to other areas, and even defended when in danger of disappearing because of unforeseeable events or lack of institutional support.

In our sample of 13 partnerships, five were in the committed stage. The large number is easily explained by our selection bias toward including successful partnerships. More surprising to us about these partnerships was actually the lack of commonalities among them. Three had lasted more than five semesters, but two had not. Four were connected to IHEs with well-established service-learning programs, but one was connected with an IHE completely disengaged from service-learning. In three of them, community partners were familiar with service-learning, but in two of them this was their first experience.

These results would suggest that these partnerships shared nothing or that what was shared escaped our analysis. Luckily, an analysis of the aggregate results of all partnerships permit us to advance two factors which do help to anticipate when partnerships are most likely to travel committed paths. Aggregating the results permitted considering the evidence deriving from the partnerships, even when the responses of the different members of a partnership provided inconsistent responses. We report on this aggregate analysis: first, we reflect on the age of the relationship, and second, we consider differences in the institutional priorities of the parties—a factor that also emerged as defining in the tentative path.

*Age: Is nurturing dominant in older partnerships?* All the partnerships included in our sample had lasted at least two semesters, but some had lasted much longer. For example, one of the partnerships has been functioning for the last 10 years. We considered five semesters to be a good cut-off point to

Table 3

*Results Aggregated by Age of Partnership*

| Partnerships | Learning | Aligning | Nurturing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Under 5 semesters | 46% (46) | 10% (10) | 45% (45) |
| Over 5 semesters | 29% (47) | 32% (52) | 39% (62) |
| Total | 93 | 62 | 107 |

A chi-square test of independence results on p-value > 0.05 (p-value = 0.9235).

Table 4

*Results Aggregated by Type of Partner*

| | Learning | Aligning | Nurturing | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Community | 33% (36) | 20% (22) | 47% (52) | 110 |
| University* | 38% (57) | 26% (40) | 36% (52) | 149 |

A chi-square test of independence results on p-value > 0.05 (p-value = 0.9899).
* faculty + service-learning coordinator

differentiate between new and old partnerships—it implied partners had decided to continue working together for at least two years and at most five years. This cut-off point is arbitrary but, considering the lack of empirical research on this area, we believe it provides a useful initial categorization which can be further refined in future research. Table 3 shows the aggregate frequency considering this cut-off point.

This aggregate analysis yields two interesting results. First, the number of times interviewees used learning-related verbs to describe actions and interactions shows that learning was more dominant in newer partnerships (see Table 3). Second, and most surprisingly, the frequency count is inconclusive regarding the likelihood of interviewees using nurturing-related verbs.

These results suggest that whether time is relevant for partnerships to evolve into nurturing requires further exploration. As suggested in our analysis of the tentative path, we advance that there are partnerships that will never progress into the committed stage. Our sample includes one example of such partnership. This partnership included a large private university and a community agency that recurrently engages volunteers. The instructor had a roster of agencies involved in the service-learning course and the engagement was limited to students volunteering a few hours. The community agency's engagement with the student was similar to the one held with other short-term volunteers. For the IHE, the community agency was one of a relatively large roster that could house students for specific service-learning courses.

In addition, as suggested in our analysis of the aligned stage, we also conjecture that there are partnerships that will immediately progress into nurturing. Our sample also includes an example of such partnership. This partnership included a small private suburban college. The service-learning project varied, involving different instructors and disciplines over time. The IHE partner was immediately committed to maintaining a close relationship with an agency the IHE interviewee described as responsive and flexible. The community agency was also immediately committed to the partnership. The community interviewee explained the

engagement referring to the agency's management familiarity with service-learning and their belief that an engagement with the IHE served to further the agency's mission beyond the specific service-learning project.

*Do institutional factors define the likelihood of progressing toward the committed stage?* Table 4 shows the results of our frequency counts clustered around whether the interviewee was from the IHE or community. As the table shows, there were statistically significant differences between community and university. Even more interesting, community partners were more likely to use nurturing-related verbs and descriptions.

These results suggest that indeed institutional factors mediate service-learning partnerships, most particularly, the mission of the community partners involved affects the likelihood of a partnership progressing to a nurturing path. Two cases in our sample illustrate this finding. These two partnerships involved community organizations working with stigmatized populations. These organizations were quite interested in engaging with IHEs because they saw it as a way to further their institutional missions—interviewees from these organizations discussed at length how the engagement would change perceptions about the population their agencies served. Their IHEs counterparts also argued that the partnerships serve their missions but only insofar as advancing their service-learning agenda.

In addition, this care and interest in service-learning by community partners was frequently accompanied by comments in which they expressed love for working with students. The connection between these two factors—institutional mission and personal interest in working with students—supports the various formulations of reciprocity in partnerships that have been posited in the practice of service-learning over the past 25 years (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989; Sigmon, 1979; Stanton, 1987). This reciprocity views the community as *active partners* in learning and serving, not just passive recipients of the service provided by service-learning students. The following two comments from community interviewees involved in two very different partnerships illustrate how they felt about working with students and the value of partnerships in service-learning.

It's probably one of the best parts of my job. I really like hearing that what we're doing is not only affecting the people that we serve as clients, but what young people are getting out of it. (C10, 75)

That you know everybody sort of ... walks away having changed in some way or having learned in some way ... the students would get involved with us and certainly provide some sort of service, but in exchange with that bring back to their classrooms and to their work. (C7, 12)

## Discussion and Conclusion

We hope this study encourages further research on the nature and development of service-learning partnerships. Holland and Gelmon (1998) once wrote "When you've see one partnership you've seen one partnership." Our research coincides but provides what we believe is a useful categorization of partnerships depending on the path of engagement defining the relationship. The categorization is consistent with recent work by Bringle and Hatcher (2002), suggesting partnerships evolve from tit-for-tat to committed relations over time. It does however provide a more nuanced view advancing that many partnerships will never follow this progression. More interestingly, our research indicates that those partnerships which are likely to travel this path may do so quickly as the commitment of the partners to the relationship encourages them to solve and adjust to any initial problems.

Methodologically this study has the advantage of building on a sample including multiple case studies involving a diverse set of institutions. Nonetheless our sampling procedure—as well as the open-ended nature of the interviews conducted—was directed toward increasing the richness of the information collected as opposed to its representativeness. Consequently, we regard the results reported not as definitive, but as promising directions for further research, theory development, and methodological refinements.

Theoretically the challenge on studying service-learning partnerships is to approach the research with a view that is neither exclusively focused on the development of the relationship nor solely concentrated on organizational factors. Note that the path of engagement of our partnerships was remarkably dependent not only on relationship development-related factors (i.e., age) but also on the mission of the organizations. Bell-Elkins (2002) has proposed structuration theory as a useful framework to address this duality. We suggest, instead, negotiated order (Strauss, 1978). We prefer this view because of its long tradition in the organizational theory field and because it is easier to

operationalize than structuration (see Barley, 1986; Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

In any event, in our current state of understanding of the paths, roles, and impact of community-campus partnerships, it may be too early to foreclose our understanding with one theoretical orientation. Hence we further encourage keeping the theoretical debate current. We want to make a case, though, for the value of building on the work of scholars that have addressed similar questions in other areas; whether it is interpersonal relations, as Bringle and Hatcher (2002) have done, or collaborative arrangements among organizations with diverse missions, as examined in this article. It is also relevant to heed Jones' (2003) conclusion that, "... it is important to remember that partnerships with community agencies are, in fact, based on partnerships among individuals" (p. 170). Moreover, in advancing research on partnerships we need to understand both the paths trodden by the individuals who develop them and the institutional dynamics involved; including institutional processes leading to the creation of transformative partnerships as posited by Enos and Morton (2003).

Finally, we urge other scholars to continue efforts to understand the community dimensions of service-learning partnerships. We now have some evidence on the progressions of partnerships, their perceived benefits, the challenges of establishing them, and the paths that might be taken. We began this study with the question of the process of the development of these partnerships; the study concludes with the question of the diverse approach that IHEs and community agencies may have toward service-learning. To explore and test these questions empirically is the next step to enriching our empirical and theoretical understanding of this crucial aspect of effective service-learning.

## Note

[1] The authors thank one of the reviewers for pointing out some of these characteristics to us.

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## Appendix A
### *Protocol of Questions*

1. Please describe your personal involvement in the project.

2. Please discuss your motivation to participate in the project.

3. Please discuss the initial receptiveness and commitment of each of the partners to the project.

4. Please describe resistance encountered and methods you used to overcome them. Please be as specific as possible providing us with anecdotes or stories. (We do not need to know however the names of the specific individuals.)

5. Please discuss the use of any strategy that help to initiate, implement, gain commitment from the partners, and in general further the goals of the project.

6. Please discuss any recognition you might have received for your role in the project.

7. Please discuss the risk, both personal and organizational, associated with the project.

8. Please discuss your perception of your effectiveness in carrying out the project.

9. Please identify factors contributing to the success or failure of the project.

10. Please discuss your experience with previous service-learning projects

11. Did your previous experience influenced your behavior in this project? How? Can you give an example? (It is really a follow up question to the previous one.)

12. Please discuss your relationship with the members of this partnership and how it influenced your behavior in this partnership.

13. Please say something about how successful the project was.

14. Please indicate any ways in which you think the project failed.

15. What factors contributed to success and failure?

# Appendix B

*Frequency Counts by Partnership and Interviewee*

| Partnership | Interviewees | Learning | | Aligning | | Nurturing | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | CG | - - | | - - | | 1 | 100% |
| | SL | 7 | **41%** | 3 | 18% | 7 | **41%** |
| | FH | 4 | 36% | 1 | 9% | 6 | **55%** |
| | CB | 3 | 21% | 3 | 21% | 8 | **57%** |
| | | 14 | 33% | 7 | 16% | 22 | 51% |
| 10 | CB | 4 | 29% | 3 | 21% | 7 | **50%** |
| | SS & FL | 4 | **57%** | 3 | 43% | | 0% |
| | | 8 | 38% | 6 | 29% | 7 | 33% |
| 5 | CGr | 2 | **50%** | - - | | 2 | **50%** |
| | CGv | 6 | 38% | 2 | 13% | 8 | **50%** |
| | SM | 8 | 36% | 2 | 9% | 12 | **55%** |
| | | 16 | 38% | 4 | 10% | 22 | 52% |
| 6 | FG | 6 | **60%** | 1 | 10% | 3 | 30% |
| | SO | 6 | **67%** | - - | | 3 | 33% |
| | | 12 | 63% | 1 | 5% | 6 | 32% |
| 4 | CC | 4 | **57%** | | | 3 | 43% |
| | | 4 | 57% | | | 3 | 43% |
| 2 | CL | 6 | **50%** | - - | | 6 | **50%** |
| | CT | 5 | **36%** | 3 | 21% | 6 | **43%** |
| | SR | - - | | - - | | 5 | **100%** |
| | | 11 | 35% | 3 | 10% | 17 | 55% |
| 11 | CA | | 0% | - - | 0% | 4 | **100%** |
| | SM | 3 | **43%** | 2 | 29% | 2 | 29% |
| | | 3 | 27% | 2 | 18% | 6 | 55% |
| 13 | SK | 5 | **50%** | 2 | 20% | 3 | 30% |
| | CB | 3 | **50%** | 2 | 33% | 1 | 17% |
| | | 8 | 50% | 4 | 25% | 4 | 25% |
| 12 | SK | 5 | **83%** | - - | | 1 | 17% |
| | | 5 | 83% | | | 1 | 17% |
| 3 | FH | 1 | 14% | 5 | **71%** | 1 | 14% |
| | SG | 3 | 30% | 5 | **50%** | 2 | 20% |
| | CM | 2 | 18% | 7 | **64%** | 2 | 18% |
| | | 6 | 21% | 17 | 61% | 5 | 18% |
| 9 | FD | 3 | 27% | 2 | 18% | 6 | **55%** |
| | | 3 | 27% | 2 | 18% | 6 | **55%** |
| 1 | CG | 1 | 14% | 2 | 29% | 4 | **57%** |
| | FL | 3 | 25% | 4 | 33% | 5 | **42%** |
| | | 4 | 21% | 6 | 32% | 9 | 47% |
| 8 | FC | 2 | 15% | 9 | **69%** | 2 | 15% |
| | | 2 | 15% | 9 | 69% | 2 | 15% |
| | | 93 | 35% | 62 | 24% | 107 | 41% |

(*) Bold font has been used to identify the dominant behavior.