



# Key Elements of Effective Service-Learning Partnerships from the Perspective of Community Partners

Alan Tinkler, Barri Tinkler, Ethan Hausman, and Gabriella Tufo Strouse

*Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning & Civic Engagement*  
Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 2014

---

**To more fully appreciate the nature of reciprocal service-learning relationships, the authors (two community partners and two faculty members at the University of Vermont) explore six things community partners want you to know about what makes effective service-learning partnerships. While the six are not intended to be a comprehensive tally, they offer insights into the structure necessary to ensure that relationships are beneficial from the community partner's perspective. In order, the six are (a) be attentive to the community partner's mission and vision, (b) understand the human dimension of the community partner's work, (c) be mindful of the community partner's resources, (d) accept and share the responsibility for inefficiencies, (e) consider the legacy of the partnership, and (f) regard the process as important. In addition to defining the elements, illustrations of practice from our ongoing service-learning partnerships are provided in order to more fully understand the nature of reciprocity and respect.**

---

In 2010, the teacher education program at the University of Vermont was awarded a Learn and Serve grant from the Corporation for National Service. The goal of the grant was to integrate service-learning experiences throughout the teacher education program with a particular focus on providing academic support to English language learners (ELLs). Since the grant team wanted to develop reciprocal partnerships with community agencies, the team spent the first year of the grant pursuing a participatory process to lay the foundation for these partnerships (Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin, & Mugisha, 2014). Ethan and Gabriella, two community partners who are co-authors of this article, played important roles in establishing reciprocal relationships between the university and the community agencies with which they work.

Because of the success of the participatory process, we decided to study this collaboration to examine the key elements of effective practices from the perspective of community partners.

## Literature Review

As the field of service-learning in higher education continues to evolve (Butin, 2006), researchers are beginning to make important distinctions between different types of service-learning (Butin, 2007). Practitioners, for instance, have started to contrast traditional or charity service-learning with critical or social justice service-learning to distinguish forms of service-learning (Long & Campbell, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). This distinction is important since critical or social justice approaches to service-learning are distinct in how the community is included in the partnership relationship (Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin & Mugisha, 2014), and in how the instructor seeks to support learning outcomes by carefully selecting service experiences that challenge learners' perspectives (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2013). The combination of these concerns means that with critical or social justice service-learning there is greater emphasis on the reciprocity of the experience.

The importance of reciprocity has long been a part of the conversation around service-learning pedagogy. In 2000, Andrew Furco offered a useful conceptual definition of service-learning that emphasized the importance of reciprocity that has been a cornerstone definition for individuals interested in service-learning pedagogy. He wrote:

Service-learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. (p. 12)

As mentioned, practitioners who advocate for social justice service-learning have placed an essential focus on reciprocity since the goal of critical service-learning is to involve the community in making important decisions that impact community organizations (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). This ensures that the needs of the community remain a priority in the implementation of programs (Marullo & Edwards, 2000), particularly now that service-learning is becoming more widespread across educational landscapes. In fact, scholars like Mitchell (2008) argue that critical service-learning is service-learning where community partners help to "create and define the service-learning experience" (p. 53). This is a crucial characteristic since involving the community in the decision making process in a meaningful way supports the development of genuine, sustainable relationships that benefit both sides of the partnership (Enos & Morton, 2003).

To date, there is a large body of work examining the impact on college students who participate in service-learning (Root, Callahan & Billig, 2005). There is less attention paid to the perspective of the community partner (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Worrall, 2007). When the community partner's perspective is considered, it is generally with an eye

toward (a) the nature of the partnership, often with a focus on the pragmatics needed to guide effective practice, including the need for “more coordination and communication” (Vernon & Ward, 1999, p. 32); or (b) the benefit to the community partner, including a correlation between agency voice and benefits (Gelmon et al., 1998; Miron & Moely, 2006). Often, the articles rightly identify that effective “campus-community partnerships require attention to and exploration of both distinct needs and interests of higher education and community partners” (Sandy & Holland, 2006, p. 30).

This article attempts to offer insight by examining partnerships from a different vantage point, specifically the features that community partners want service-learning practitioners to consider as part of developing an effective relationship, which is different from those elements specifically needed for program development/delivery. Thus, we cast light on the need to step back and consider the important interrelated roles of philosophy, culture, and practice. We developed a list of desired partnership features. The list emerged from a collaboration with two community partners who have been involved with service-learning programs and program development with the University of Vermont. By offering a discrete list, this research focuses attention on those aspects of reciprocal relationships that are of specific interest to community partners.

## Methods

Since the authors of this study are also participants, it is necessary to provide some context for our work. Ethan Hausman is the Coordinator of the O'Brien Community Center, a multi-faceted community center with a range of programs, including a Teen Center, a Boys & Girls Club, a Coalition for a Safe and Peaceful Community, and organizations related to health and wellness, among others. Ethan has been coordinator for four years and holds a degree in Community Development and Applied Economics. Gabriella Tufo Strouse is the Volunteer Coordinator of King Street Center in Burlington, Vermont, a center with a rich history. The center, in fact, recently celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition to other programs, King Street Center has afterschool enrichment programs, programs for adults, and a large mentoring program. Gabriella has been at King Street since 1994, and currently coordinates more than 100 volunteers, including 50 who mentor in a highly-regarded mentoring program. Finally, both Alan Tinkler and Barri Tinkler teach at the University of Vermont in the Secondary Education Program. They have spearheaded the teacher education program's service-learning initiative, which has continued without pause even after Congress eliminated funding for Learn and Serve America. Alan also partners with both the O'Brien Community Center and King Street Center in his Reading and Writing in the Content Area course, a junior-level class for secondary education students which focuses on advancing literacy practices across the curriculum. The course includes a service-learning component where pre-service teachers provide academic support for high school aged students, who are predominately English language learners, at both community centers.

In order to explore our partnership, we used an interpretive framework since interpretive research “is, at its core, a search for local meanings” (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007, p. 4). Moreover, we sought to approach this work through the lens of collaborative research since the goal was to value all voices in the research process. According to Pushor (2008), collaborative research “enables the voices of researchers and those in the field—practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders—to be positioned alongside one another in a shared inquiry of mutual interest and benefit” (p. 91). We had access to a range of data sources for this collaborative research, and the procedures for data collection were approved by the university’s IRB office (CHRBS#: B11-094). This included four semi-structured (Patton, 2002) interviews that Barri conducted with community partners. Ethan and Gabriella were interviewed, as well as two K-12 community partners. The interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, were designed to provide insight into the needs and goals of community partners and how they conceptualized a partnership with the university to support these needs and goals.

In addition, Alan met with nine potential community partners as part of the development of the overall service-learning initiative. His notes and reflections on these meetings provided a view into concerns across the community. After meeting with these stakeholders, Alan organized two community partner advisory committee meetings. The first meeting focused on describing the goals of the Learn and Serve grant initiative and opening up dialogue so that the committee could have input into the work of the initiative. During the second meeting, we brainstormed ways to align community needs with academic course objectives in addition to discussing Andrew Furco’s (2000) definition of service-learning. Data from these meetings included detailed minutes as well as participant observation notes (Creswell, 2002). A final data source included email from the listserv created for the community partner advisory committee as well as Alan’s one-on-one email with a range of community partners.

Using these data as a base of foundational knowledge, Alan engaged in systematic dialogues with Ethan and Gabriella. According to Pushor (2008), collaborative research “invites rich dialogue between and among individuals and the multiple perspectives they represent” (p. 92). These intensive dialogues were both a method of data collection as well as a method of data analysis (Constantino, 2008) as we co-constructed knowledge. Therefore the findings that we present were not determined by Alan and Barri, but were clearly defined through dialogue with Ethan and Gabriella. Through this process, we identified six items that we collectively deemed important in supporting effective service-learning partnerships that benefit community partners.

## Findings

By focusing on six points, we offer a list that is comprehensive though certainly not exhaustive. The list is ranked from the community partner’s perspective in order to put pressure on the academic bias that tends to accompany service-learning relationships (Stoecker & Tryon,

2009). At the core, it is a list that offers a commitment to communication and collaboration, and it is this ethos that is at the center of the University of Vermont's service-learning initiative. To that end, we collaboratively and respectfully offer the following six points to consider when working with community partners to advance service-learning:

1. Be attentive to the community partner's mission and vision.
2. Understand the human dimension of the community partner's work.
3. Be mindful of the community partner's resources.
4. Accept and share the responsibility for inefficiencies.
5. Consider the legacy of the partnership.
6. Regard process as important.

### ***Be Attentive to the Community Partner's Mission and Vision***

For our first item, we stress what is central to each community partner: mission and vision. The commitment to understanding mission and vision (Hosman, 2014) allows university faculty and students to more fully appreciate the community partner's work and their pledge to the community. At King Street Center, for instance, the mission is to "promote personal and social wellness through educational, recreational, and social programs" with a goal (or vision) to "give children, youth, and families the life-building skills necessary for a healthy and productive future" (King Street Center, n.d.). At this point, King Street serves more than 500 children and families each year. In addition to a superb staff, King Street Center has over 100 volunteers who are committed to supporting the mission and vision of the organization. As such, pre-service teachers enter a complex organization where there is a discernible strategic focus, including a strategic plan which at this point includes a capital campaign to expand its center to address space needs because of programmatic growth.

By regarding the mission and vision, through effective reflection activities, university faculty and pre-service teachers focus attention on their responsibility to the community organization, as their work will advance the mission and goals of the community partner. In other words, even as the service-learning relationship should be advancing each student's personal, civic, and professional development (i.e. some of the learning goals), the service side of the equation should advance the mission and goals of the community partner. This deliberate reciprocity is an important aspect of social justice service-learning because it aligns action with the community partner's mission and vision which is inextricably linked with their goal to advance equity and justice.

This purposeful reciprocity is possible when there is an ongoing commitment to being attentive to the community partner's mission and vision. Each semester, for instance, there is an onsite orientation session that includes a site tour so students get a sense of the mission of the site. Since each site offers a variety of programs, the tour allows students to see how their role fits into the larger mission of the organization. Of course, strategic objectives change for organizations. Recently, for instance, King Street Center changed its name from King Street

Youth Center when the center adjusted its programming to offer opportunities to other community stakeholders, particularly adult refugees.

This attention to the dynamism of organizations allows the reciprocal partnership to focus on programmatic development. After initial contact with the O'Brien Community Center, the service-learning relationship was originally conceived as an opportunity to support summer programs. During a subsequent interview, Ethan recognized an opportunity and mentioned that the Teen Center wanted to provide academic support in concert with its other Teen Center activities during the traditional academic year. The process was dialogic which Ethan expressed during an interview:

My most recent idea is that perhaps a robust tutoring program is the way to both start to move the Teen Center toward more programming rather than just sort of drop in/hang out, and to drive better diversity. I mean that basically if we can identify kids who can benefit from the tutoring and figure out ways to convince them to come in, the kids that can benefit from tutoring aren't just ELL kids, not just refugee kids, they're sort of across the spectrum is my guess. And so if that could be a way that we bring more kids to the center, I think almost inherently it will be a more diverse group than what we see right now. So that's what I'd like to see happen with the Teen Center, is to figure out a way to sort of reach kids with valuable tutoring.

With this seed planted, over the next six months, a service-learning commitment was established to support this goal of academic support for community youth. From that point to the present, students from the Reading and Writing in the Content Area course support the Teen Center every semester with tutoring assistance several evenings a week. When another faculty member in the teacher education program expressed interest in adding a service-learning experience to her adolescent development course, Alan was able to facilitate the additional partnership with Ethan as the tutoring program at O'Brien began to expand.

This programmatic development was possible because close attention was paid to the center's mission and vision. In fact, in many meaningful ways the mission became a shared mission. This awareness informs one aspect of a mutually beneficial relationship, for if careful attention is not paid to mission and vision, it is difficult to establish a mutually beneficial collaborative relationship. This helps, in other words, to define an aspect of the relationship, a relationship that values and affirms mission and vision statements.

### ***Understand the Human Dimension of the Community Partner's Work***

While this shares some similarities to understanding the mission and vision, it is a discrete item because our partners found it crucial that service-learning participants understand the human dimension of their work. When discussing those participants who were particularly adept at providing service to the center, Ethan realized that the more effective tutors were those who were particularly adept at understanding the human dimension of the work. They were

students who understood the importance of developing relationships with the community youth who came to the center.

One former student, Cameron Smithgall, exemplifies this element. Cameron, who initially worked with the Teen Center at O'Brien Community Center as part of the Reading and Writing in the Content Area course, continued to volunteer at the center even after the academic experience was over. Cameron was particularly adept at engaging the Teen Center students because he viewed his "task" as a community member working in concert with youth to advance understanding, not simply as an expert who was able to instruct students. As a result of his effective interactions, Cameron started providing orientation and support for new service-learning tutors in addition to his continued work at the center. In short, Cameron was able to develop trust with community youth, as he was able to understand the human dimension of the work.

To frame this in another way, Cameron engendered trust, which is a concept that the American philosopher Alphonso Lingis spends time thinking and writing about. In his book *Trust*, Lingis (2004) writes, "[t]rust, which is as compelling as belief, is not produced by knowledge" (p. 64). Trust is what is formed when individuals have respect for themselves and for each other. Anything that jeopardizes trust works to the detriment of the partnership since trust provides the foundation for reciprocity (Malm, Prete, Calamia, & Eberle, 2012). As mentioned earlier, reciprocal relationships are an important aspect of the ethos of social justice service-learning, and this reciprocity is as true for the participants as it is for the organizations. Importantly, reciprocal relationships empower all participants, and this reciprocal empowerment is an important aspect of understanding the human dimensions of this work.

Central to this notion is the importance of understanding each individual's experience. One way to do this is by sharing stories. A local high school teacher who was interviewed recognized that "placing [community youth] with university students deepens instructional relationships and offers both groups insights into the other's needs and dreams." As part of his instruction, this teacher supports students in developing their own digital stories because such projects allow "students to write, record, and graphically illustrate their personal stories." This commitment to the individual is central to the work done within the community centers. In fact, the community centers are acutely aware of and concerned with the hurdles faced by refugee families. Stories allow access to the personal dimension of the community partner's work. Not surprisingly, this reinforces the goals of the community centers.

### ***Be Mindful of the Community Partner's Resources***

While budget concerns are rather self-evident to those who operate and work for organizations, university students and faculty need to be aware of their impact on organizations (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000), particularly given that time, like money, is a limited resource. This is particularly true in today's environment where budget pressures and fundraising challenges are endemic to community organizations. According to Gabriella, a

constant challenge for meeting community needs is “time and money.” The staff is “stretched thin” so it is important that our partnership does not cause further demands for resources.

In a book titled *The Unheard Voices* edited by Stoecker and Tryon (2009), Tryon, Hilgendorf, and Scott (2009) identify the problem of faculty who abdicate responsibility by appearing and reappearing only at the “book-ends” of the semester. Such a lack of faculty presence throughout the semester demonstrates a lack of attention to the time and resources being committed by the community partner. In fact, such actions often force community organizations to invest additional time to initiate communication when issues arise.

By managing a series of reflection activities that attend to resources and capacity issues, pre-service teachers are able to think about appropriate behaviors and dispositions in advance of their site orientations. In addition, since both Ethan and Gabriella are very aware of the developmental process that college students go through in their transition to adulthood, they have realistic expectations of what is appropriate. Community partners who do not understand the developmental process of college students may not be able to recognize each student as a potential asset (Darby et al., 2013). Being aware of this is important as the partnerships work to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

One way we support this in our partnerships is through an activity log that provides community partners a chance to identify any concerns that they have about a particular student. This helps to facilitate the flow of information between the community partners and the course instructors. Each time a student fills in their hours for a session, they get it signed by the community partner. At that time, the community partner can also rate the student, selecting “S” for satisfactory or “C” for concern. If there is a concern, the student is not able to return to the site until the concern has been addressed. Alan and Gabriella developed this rating system to allow the community partner a chance to give feedback. In essence, the rating offers the community partner an opportunity to identify a concern, and once the concern is raised, supports are provided to ensure the student a chance to learn from the event. For instance, concern could be expressed for routine tardiness or an inappropriate comment. Each of these cases offers a learning opportunity for students who are developing their professional skills. Gabriella stated, “We would like more partnerships, like the one with Alan Tinkler, where there is an ongoing commitment and a cycle of feedback.”

As an aside, this work has also helped the community partners frame the transition to college since they have an increased understanding of the developmental process that college students go through, and since each community center hopes to increase the number of students attending college, this awareness helps them with their college preparation work.

### ***Accept and Share the Responsibility for Inefficiencies***

To raise the issue of inefficiencies is difficult, particularly in a society that applauds efficiency and productivity [even without rewarding such increases in productivity, see Timothy Noah’s *The Great Divergence* (2012)]. Inefficiencies are, however, endemic to the process of developing

mutually beneficial relationships; they are, in other words, part of the process. To put this in perspective, a system that is perfectly efficient would include no downtime for any of the participants. The goal with tutoring, of course, is not perfect efficiency; the goal is to augment learning. Leaving aside issues of imagined or perceived notions of entitlement, the important point is that university students and faculty must be prepared for inefficiencies.

In a pragmatic sense, this means accepting the volatility of the flow of community youth who attend schools where homework and study demands are not linear. There are cycles when students need more support, and there are other times where the support is less needed. While it is worth tracking usage to see whether coverage is appropriate, the primary goal is to have support available when needed. At O'Brien, for instance, the tutoring schedule was shifted to later in the evening to take advantage of a greater teen presence in the center at that time. At King Street, we schedule additional tutors for those evenings where patterns of participation show increased need. However, even with best attempts at scheduling, there will be downtime, and such downtime is not necessarily problematic since capacity decisions should focus on supporting youth who need tutoring. Additionally, such "inefficiencies" offer other opportunities. After all, if college students use such downtime to study, they are modeling skills that make students successful in college.

Another aspect of this is to think about what college students are doing when there is not a rush for their services. Collaboratively, we developed some rules and protocols for such times. For instance, tutors are not allowed to use technology while waiting for youth since technology is a potential barrier for youth to overcome, as youth may not want to "interrupt" someone who is fully engaged with their iPad or iPhone. Another reason is the problematic message of the haves and the have-nots, as most community youth who use the center do not have such technologies, though this may change as the local school district has adopted a one-to-one technology initiative where each student will have a computer (a MacBook Pro or an iPad). As this technology initiative progresses, the collaborative partnership will adjust to provide support for youth as they navigate learning opportunities supported by technology.

When thinking about program development, it is important to remember that development takes time, patience and practice for all parties involved in the reciprocal relationship. As mentioned earlier, O'Brien was looking to add academic support to their Teen Center activities. While it took very little time for the program to launch, there was some uncertainty about adding academic support to what had historically been a social program. To put this another way, if too much concern is placed on efficiency, it would be difficult to pilot new opportunities.

This is a good moment to note that faculty, students, and community partners must be fully aware that service-learning takes additional time and effort when compared to most traditional higher education classroom experiences (which represent experiences that are highly efficient). Service-learning, though, is worth the time and effort, particularly if careful attention is given to developing a reciprocal service-learning relationship. This is why effective reflection activities

are so important since reflection allows students an opportunity to process their experiences, including their commitments of time and effort, as they advance their learning.

### ***Consider the Legacy of the Partnership***

Since service-learning is generally managed from semester to semester, the fifth item on the list is to consider the legacy of the partnership. When thinking about legacy, university students and faculty are afforded an opportunity to regard the relationship and impact in another way, a way that does not end when grades are submitted at the end of the semester. According to one of our community partners, "Service-learning has a notion in and of itself as being helpful. If it's done poorly, it can be bad." The commitment to legacy provides a useful way to frame service-learning as critical (rather than charity). While charity maintains a deficit approach (Cohen, 2012), critical service-learning that is mindful of legacy can advance social justice goals.

Another reason why attention to legacy is important is it affords university students who are often at a site for only one semester an opportunity to understand the community organization's long-term commitment. Importantly, this notion of legacy implies that value is being added within a conceptual (and temporal) framework that expands beyond the end of the semester. This framework aligns with the mission of the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services. The mission ends with the following: "We do this to create a more humane and just society, free from oppression, that maximizes the potential and the quality of life for all individuals, families, and communities" (College of Education and Social Services, n.d.). To create such a just and humane society requires an ongoing commitment that extends beyond the end of each semester (as well as beyond the college career, of course). To forge this commitment, it is necessary to align the mission with action.

When considering service-learning courses, this means that course syllabi must incorporate such language. For instance, in the current syllabus for the Reading and Writing in the Content Area course (Tinkler, 2014), one stated course theme is that literacies have consequences:

Every social, cultural, and educational context is defined by literacy practices that have both inclusionary and exclusionary power. These practices, taken up and valued by educators and students, constitute powerful local contexts for learning and are shaped dramatically by the instructor. The kinds of reading and writing activities teachers use communicate a powerful message about the type and quality of thinking they value and expect of their students and directly affect whether a student can participate successfully in that context.

It is not enough to suggest that action is the proper course; it is necessary for the legacy of the college and the legacy of the service-learning partnerships to activate opportunities to engage in community-based learning that has the potential to create change. Of course, the notion of legacy will vary from one student to the next, from one community partner to the next, but it is

important to be mindful of legacy, as legacy offers an opportunity to think about the long-term growth and development of the community, which includes students.

### ***Regard Process as Important***

The final point is that process is central to developing successful service-learning relationships. In fact, process should be shaped to develop partnerships that allow for the service-learning relationship to develop over time. Gabriella tells a compelling story of college students arriving one afternoon to King Street, saying, "We're here for our service-learning." It turns out that a faculty member had decided to "partner" with King Street Center; yet, King Street did not hear about the partnership until students arrived at their door. Clearly problematic, this example bluntly shows that process is crucial. Though crucial, attention to process holds the sixth position to avoid the "fallacy of process" where service-learning practitioners ignore concerns by defending their service-learning with the erroneous warrant that all is working well since a process is in place.

Our partnerships have shown a couple of discernible and effective process elements over the last couple of years. As mentioned earlier, community meetings allowed various stakeholders to share their needs to discern opportunities for partnership with the Teacher Education Program. In the invitation to the first community partner meeting, Alan wrote, "Through dialogue, we hope to develop a better understanding of organizational needs in order to align community needs with course-based service-learning opportunities." During these meetings, relationships started to form, many of which have blossomed into fruitful service-learning partnerships. One notable aspect of those community meetings was a sharing of goals and objectives. As mentioned earlier, understanding and sharing of mission and vision is important (Long & Campbell, 2012). These meetings also demonstrated the collaborative (and community-based) aspect of our shared work.

During an interview, one of our community partners described concerns he had about being approached by faculty in another department to conduct a service-learning project. His concern stemmed from the fact that the university students were approaching the project with the perspective that they would be only giving rather than gaining. The community partner reworked the project around principles of community-based research to make apparent the learning gains for the college students. Though the project led to successful outcomes for both sides, the onus should not be on community partners to create projects to promote reciprocity.

To overtly attend to issues of process, when Gabriella and Alan were planning for the first service-learning semester at King Street, they discussed the pros and cons of earlier service-learning work. One issue that came up was the problem associated with the omnipresent "counting of hours." Too often students would be required to complete a certain number of hours, and once students crossed the required threshold, they disappeared up the hill, literally in this case, to the university. So, instead of counting hours, Gabriella and Alan decided that students would make a weekly commitment, arriving at King Street on the same evening every

week to establish consistency (which is an effective aspect to impactful tutoring programs). With this consistent commitment, King Street youth learned that particular tutors would be available on particular evenings, allowing greater opportunity to form relationships (which is also an important aspect for impactful tutoring). Turning away from the “hours-count” had other benefits as well. Since the weekly commitment became the norm, Alan was able to tailor each service-learning experience to the needs of each partner. As mentioned, students from the Reading and Writing in the Content Area course are partnered with both community organizations (King Street Center and O’Brien Community Center). Because of differing needs, the time spent at each site varies, but the weekly commitment is the standard.

One size does not fit all situations, and being sensitive to the particular needs of the community partners affirmed that the partnership was in fact a partnership. The process of routine evaluation and feedback is crucial. As mentioned earlier, shared reflection around mission and vision has allowed the aforementioned partnerships to remain dynamic, attending to shifting needs. The Reading and Writing in the Content Area class, for example, became a 4-credit class, starting in the fall of 2012, to accommodate additional work on effective tutoring. So, a greater portion of the class is now spent on thinking and learning about effective tutoring strategies. This augmentation within the course will positively impact the work done with community partners. At the core, a commitment to process is a commitment to communication. And, such communication helps to minimize the academic bias of service-learning. While such a bias seems almost unavoidable given the pressures placed on partnerships by academic calendars, openness and dialogue mitigate such issues since concerns are voiced and addressed. As stated by Gabriella, “Alan has shown us that a partnership can be win-win. We have a mutual agreement to help students grow.”

## Limitations and Further Research

Given the small size of the study within a particular context, the results are not generalizable. The ordering of the key elements is also subject to the same limitation. Yet, these limitations make clear one goal of the study, which is to enhance dialogue to support the formation of effective service-learning partnerships. The examination of this particular instance of place and partnership, however, offer a frame that can be used by others who hope to establish meaningful partnerships.

Another limitation, of course, is that the list is generated from the perspective of the community partner. While the authors believe that this represents one of the strengths of the study, it is also a limitation. One goal of the project was to help inform the dialogue; the project was never intended to be singularly comprehensive. In other words, there is a formative commitment to dialogue where community partner voice is empowered to advance reciprocal partnerships.

The authors focused on six items to allow each item to resonate. This number, however, is arbitrary. Additionally, the key elements focus on actions that should be taken (rather than

erroneous or problematic actions that have been taken). This list does not enumerate the typical problems faced by partnerships. While to some degree this represents a rhetorical preference of the authors, the study should not be taken as the singular six elements that forge meaningful relationships. The limitations, however, point to the strength of the participatory process.

Given the sample size of this study, further research would offer a chance to evaluate the efficacy of the six key elements as well as the (weighted) ordering of the elements. The ordering of the list, similarly, represents an opportunity for additional study. Since this study looks at the partnership relationship from the perspective of the organizers of the partnership relationship, it would be interesting to expand the scope of the inquiry to examine how other constituents view effective relationships, including community participants as well as student participants.

Finally, given the importance of evidence-based evaluation, it would be interesting to measure how attention to these elements impacts outcomes. This would help to inform program development as well, as was made clear in an email from Ethan to Alan: "One of the consequences of our success with the tutoring program is that WHS [Winooski High School] students are now showing up every day, afternoons and evenings, for tutoring" (personal communication, April, 19, 2012). Given the increased participation, it would be interesting to examine the efficacy of an integrated approach to education where community partners share the work to advance student skills and proficiencies.

## Significance of the Conversation

As mentioned at the start of the article, there is insufficient attention paid to the efficacy of service-learning from the perspective of community partners. By offering up six items, jointly formed and collaboratively considered, this article points to the importance of developing effective critical partnerships while expanding the dialogue around the mission and vision of community partners (and of academic partners). After all, as noted by Dewey (1938), experience is valuable when experiential learning is carefully managed; in fact, Dewey argues, "all genuine education comes about through experience" (p.25). As such, education is an "active and constructive" (p.25) process. Service-learning, too, is most effective when it is built upon a foundation of action and construction.

To discern the perspective of community partners is not a speculative process. In fact, it is vital since a lack of attention to constructive reciprocity runs the risk of being viewed by students as charity. Such a reversal to a deficit perspective is avoidable if advocates of critical service-learning understand the perspective of community partners in service-learning relationships. As this article makes clear, a commitment to process is crucial when establishing, maintaining, and developing relationships. Relationships built on reciprocity and respect offer the necessary foundation to support effective service-learning programming. And, such relationships allow for mutually beneficial partnerships.

## References

- Blouin, D. & Perry, E. (2009). Whom does service learning really serve? Community-based organizations' perspectives on service learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 37(2), 120-35.
- Borko, H., Liston, D. & Whitcomb, J. (2007). Editorial: Genres of empirical research in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 3-11.
- Boyle-Baise, M. & Langford, J. (2004). There are children here: Service learning for social justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37(1), 55-66.
- Butin, D. W. (2006). Special issue introduction: Future directions for service learning in higher education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 18(1), 1-4.
- Butin, D. W. (2007). Justice-learning: Service-learning as justice-oriented education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 40(2), 177-183.
- Cohen, A. K. (2012). Surpluses and deficits: How student leaders perceive university-community partnerships at one Ivy League institution. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning & Civic Engagement*, 3(1), 1-18.
- College of Education and Social Services. (n.d.). *About our college*. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~cess/?Page=about/about.html&SM=aboutmenu.html>
- Costantino, T. E. (2008). Dialogue. In L. Given (Ed.) *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 2*, (pp. 212-213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Darby, A. N., Ward-Johnson, F., Newman, G., Haglund, M. & Cobb, T. (2013). Motivation to collaborate: Applying motivation theory to community organizations and universities working together. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning & Civic Engagement*, 4(2), 119-136.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Enos, S. & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus community partnerships. In B. Jacoby & Associates (Eds.). *Building partnerships for service-learning* (pp. 20-41). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ferrari, J. R. & Worrall, L. (2000). Assessment by community agencies: How "the other side"

sees service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7(1), 35-40.

Furco, A. (2000). *Service-learning: A balanced approach to experiential education*. Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit. Washington, DC: Campus Compact.

Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Seifer, S. D., Shinnamon, A. & Connors, K. (1998). Community-university partnerships for mutual learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 5(1), 97-107.

Hosman, L. (2014). International service-learning: Lessons of successes and challenges that defy simple categorization. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5(1), 24-50.

King Street Center. (n.d.). *Mission and history*. Retrieved from <http://www.kingstreetcenter.org/about-us/8-mission-and-history.html>.

Lingis, A. (2004). *Trust*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Long, J. & Campbell, M. (2012). Collaborative partnerships and learning: Broadening the experiences for a community organization, school and pre-service teachers. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 3(2), 99-119.

Malm, E., Prete, G., Calamia, J. & Eberle, S. (2012). The art of partnership: Engaging Individuals to empower a community. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 3(2), 78-98.

Marullo, S. & Edwards, B. (2000). From charity to justice: The potential of university-community collaboration for social change. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(5), 895-912.

Miron, D. & Moely, B. (2006). Community agency voice and benefit in service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, 12(2), 27-37.

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.

Noah, T. (2012). *The great divergence: America's growing inequality crisis and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Pushor, D. (2008). Collaborative research. In L. Given (Ed.) *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 2*, (pp. 91-94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Root, S., Callahan, J. & Billig, S. H. (Eds.). (2005). *Improving service-learning practice: Research on models to enhance impact*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Sandy, M. & Holland, B. (2006). Different worlds and common ground: Community partner perspectives on campus-community partnerships. *Michigan Journal of Service-Learning*, (13)1, 30-43.
- Stoecker, R. & Tryon, E. A. (Eds.). (2009). *The unheard voices: Community organizations and service-learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Tinkler, A. (2014). *Syllabus for EDSC 215 Reading in Secondary Schools*. (Available from the University of Vermont Department of Education, 85 South Prospect Street, Burlington, VT 05405-0160)
- Tinkler, A. & Tinkler, B. (2013). Teaching across the Community: Using service-learning field experiences to develop culturally and linguistically responsive teachers. In V. M. Jagla, J. A. Erickson, & A. S. Tinkler (Eds.), *Transforming teacher education through service-learning* (pp. 99-117). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Tinkler, A., Tinkler, B., Gerstl-Pepin, C. & Mugisha, V. (2014). The promise of a community-based, participatory approach to service-learning in teacher education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 18(3), 209-232.
- Tryon, E. A., Hilgendorf, A. & Scott, I. (2009). The heart of partnership: Communication and relationships. In R. Stoecker & E.A. Tryon (Eds.), *The unheard voices: Community organizations and service-learning* (pp. 96-115). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Vernon, A. & Ward, K. (1999). Campus and community partnerships: Assessing impacts and strengthening connections. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 6(1), 30-37.
- Worrall, L. (2007). Asking the community: A case study of community partner perspectives. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 14(1), 5-17.