

What Are the Components of Reciprocal and Mutually Beneficial Community and

University Partnerships in Education? A Literature Review

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Abstract: What follows is a literature review about the educational partnerships between the community and the university. This study used articles on the models of partnership that were characterized by reciprocity and mutuality. Reviewing the articles resulted in a list of components that constitute a reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnership between the two. These components include finding partners, partnership goals, advisory boards, communication, community involvement, leadership, roles and responsibility, site, and sustainability. The paper describes the procedures involved in conducting the literature review and discusses the components of reciprocal partnerships.

Key words: community and university partnership mechanisms; community engagement in education; reciprocal relationships; mutually beneficial partnerships

This paper is a summary of a larger literature review project on models of community and university (C-U) partnership in education. I was interested in finding models of partnership that showcased “reciprocal and mutually beneficial” C-U relationships in education. I defined

reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships as those initiatives in which all of university and community partners were actively engaged in the process of partnership including planning, design, implementation and evaluation. In these kinds of partnership, both community and university had a vested interest in collaboration. These partnerships were characterized by shared decision-making and shared resources. In these partnerships, all partners were allocated roles and responsibilities. I was also interested in models that included advisory boards consisting of community partners. I wanted to see what roles advisory board members played in the process. I used the library catalogue of the University of British Columbia to search for relevant sources.

The UBC library catalogue contains many databases including (but not limited to) Education Source, Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, Regensburg "Free" Collection, Taylor & Francis, Wiley-Blackwell, Directory of Open Access Journals, Freely Accessible Social Science Journals, Sage Journals, Oxford Journal, Factiva, Ovid, Science Direct, Freely Accessible Journals, Open Journal Systems (OJS), and Open Access Digital Library. After reviewing the retrieved publications, I found 76 articles that showcased models and projects in education. However, not all of the projects in these 76 articles met the criteria for “mutually beneficial partnerships” and “partnerships with advisory boards that included at least one community partner.” Having mutually beneficial partnerships and partnerships with advisory boards as the inclusion criterion, I thus had two exclusion criteria. First, I excluded service learning articles where universities had the substantial role in partnership and provided service to communities, while the communities did not actively participate or reciprocate. Second, I excluded the articles that claimed to have reciprocal partnerships, but had not delineated reciprocal processes.

After applying these exclusion criteria, I worked with 17 articles on reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships, and models that included advisory boards. These articles, to varying degrees, delineated the reciprocity in the partnership and explained the roles and activities of partners. These articles together gave me some insight into the processes and components of partnership. In what follows, I discuss the articles in terms of finding partners, partnership goals, advisory boards, communication, community involvement, leadership, roles and responsibility, site, other logistics and sustainability.

Finding and selecting partners

The majority of the articles that I retrieved in my initial search focused on service learning. Typically in service learning projects, there is no direct collaboration between university and community in connecting the right students to the right organizations (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). The university sends out the students to the communities to provide some services, fulfill the requirements of their course, and report back to the university. In this process, minimal communication occurs between university instructors and community organization, and there is no systematic structure in place to coordinate the goals of the course with those of the community.

The selected studies in this paper had described some criteria in finding and selecting partners. First, some universities had established long-term personal and professional relationships with community organizations before embarking on partnership or recruiting partners. Bernal, Shellman, and Reid (2004) recommended that academics join the advisory boards of the community organizations. Given the other responsibilities of the faculty, these authors recommended that community relationships become part of the working hours of the faculty and academics. Second, the university may seek partnership with community

organizations that are already involved and proactive in education (Zendell, Fortune, Mertz, & Koelewyn, 2007). Third, finding and selecting partners is a reciprocal process in which communities may contact universities to partner in organizing educational activities. In one project, a community organization began the initiative by contacting the health service provider department to help with organizing a health fair and this department then contacted the university for recruiting students to participate in the project (Leonard, 1998). Universities, on their part, may create open and accessible platforms for community organizations to connect with them. In one project, university created a hotline for community to seek information (Russel et al., 2011).

Common to these studies was that, once the partners were selected and identified, all partners together determined the criteria and principles for the following procedure. These criteria suggest transformative viewpoints compared to traditional C-U relationships usually embodied in service learning projects. Contrary to the traditional student internships, task-ticking and hours-filling, these criteria suggest university's genuine interest and activism in community causes.

Goal of partnership

The goal of partnership in the literature was translated into the vision and mission of the undertaking. The selected articles emphasized a shared mission in which all the stakeholders from the community and university discuss and negotiate their objectives for the partnership project. The objectives of the project should meet the interests of each of the stakeholders. Nonetheless, the objectives of the two partners might be varying due to the nature of their work. Usually university objectives seek student learning outcomes, whereas the community is interested in addressing the needs of its members (Zendell et al., 2007).

Many studies discussed that the solution to this is to select more than one objective and align the partnership activities in a way that these objectives are met along the way. In this regard, Thompson, Head, Rikard, McNeil, & White (2012) recommended selecting one overarching objective and prioritizing the other objectives. Zendell et al. (2007) emphasized being flexible in choosing objectives, as the objectives might change during the course of the project. Leonard (1998) wrote that, in organizing the health fair, the three partners had a shared and overarching goal, yet, each partner sought their own individual goal out of this partnership. The community organization was interested in connecting with families who had children; the service provider health department was looking to inform the families about their services; and the university sought a learning experience for its students. Further, Bernal et al. (2004) conducted a study on the partnership between university and community related to education and care. The success of the partnership was believed to be rooted in the culture and goal of community care shared by the university and the community, communication between the two, and broad and extensive knowledge of the community. A flexible agenda is crucial in negotiating and determining goals. In a partnership project for the purpose of youth development (Anyon & Fernandez, 2010), the university attended its first meeting with the community partners with no agenda in hand. Instead they began the dialogue by asking “What might we be able to do together to support young people?” (p. 42). This question proved to be a positive opening for dialogue and further collaboration.

As suggested by the reciprocal and mutually beneficial articles, it is important that the C-U partners initiate the partnership while being mindful of each other’s goals and circumstances. In this perspective, both community and university begin the partnership from a respected and valued position. In other words, community is not viewed as a broken entity that is served and

saved by university; rather, both are seen as having their own expertise, knowledge and resources. They engage in partnership because doing so enhances the outcomes for everyone who is involved.

Advisory boards

An advisory board is a primary component of mutually beneficial partnerships. The advisory boards are applicable to C-U partnerships in various ways. In the literature, the community advisory board may function as a primary decision-maker, an equal partner, a participant, or a beneficiary of the university projects. Some studies identify community advisory (CA) as a decision-maker and equal partner, but the extent to which they actually describe CA differs. In general, three types of advisory boards involving community partners were created in partnership projects: 1) a separate Community Advisory (CA) with decision making power in the partnership; 2) advisory boards bringing together representatives from both community and university; and 3) partnerships in which faculty members joined the advisory boards of the community organizations.

In Amey, Brown, and Sandmann's (2002) study, a community council (CC) was established and involved in identifying community needs in training and technology. The community council also influenced the path of the partnership and how it was conducted including university's activities, such as reviewing and approving project reports and materials before publication. The community council and a state social service agency were key to access and outreach to community members. In a different project, the partnership grant created the possibility of establishing an Aboriginal advisory board that gave insights to Native American culture (Larson, 2005). It helped nursing students and practitioners to be culturally sensitive in

their work. These insights were used in creating an educational video to familiarize the nursing students and professional students with Lakota culture.

Community members were involved in Groen and Hyland-Russell's (2012) radical humanities program that provided critical humanities education to marginalized adult learners. In this project, people from community agencies made up the advisory committee and were involved in "ongoing program planning, student recruitment and funding decisions" (p. 788), as well as evaluation and advocacy. In their project, Zendell et al. (2007) referred to a "consortium" that usually consisted of the CEO of each partner, and that was the main decision-making unit. In this project, committees and task forces were also created and consisted of agency staff and instructors. Committees were involved in many of the partnership tasks and could develop shared mission. Consortiums, committees, and task forces, co-chaired by representatives from both community and university, enabled shared leadership of the partnership. The committees developed competencies, recruited interns, and made policies. Florence et al. (2007) referred to the community curriculum committee that consisted of academic and clinical faculty and community leaders "representing various disciplines" (p. 78). These committees identified service-learning opportunities that had the potential for fulfilling the objectives of the program. The academics and the community members implemented the activities together.

Levin and Rutkow (2011) referred to a governing board in their project consisted of project staff, faculty, students, and community representative. This governing board met every three months and had regular correspondence in between. Members of the community partners worked as the Community Council (CC) that influenced policy, identified the needs of their community, and developed resources and piloted programs. In another study, Jaffe, Berman, and MacQuarrie (2011) referred to advisory board consisting of members from partners that founded

the project. They met three times per year and provided support and consultation. Also national and local advisory committee was made to offer programs and services. Another advisory committee was made of women with disabilities for outreach activities.

Board membership is reciprocal. Bernal et al. (2004), describing a successful C-U partnership model, did not mention having an advisory in their partnership. Instead they recommended that academics get involved in the boards and committees within the community in order to create and sustain long term relationships. In Pardasani's (2005) study, the community partners invited university partners to engage in projects such as a conference on homelessness. In this study, one faculty joined the steering committee of the organization. A project committee was developed to create a manual of information and resources. This committee consisted of representatives from community agencies and faculty.

Open communication

Lack of open communication and reciprocity might create tension in partnerships. Some examples include meeting with one partner and not informing other partners, reciprocating leadership roles, writing and presenting about the project, and communicating curriculum changes with community partners (Bernal et al., 2004). Regular meetings, listserves, and rigorous outreach are recommended methods for open communication (Zendell et al., 2007). Bernal et al. (2004) used weekly meetings between community and university partners, as well as mini-retreats at the end of each semester to alleviate miscommunication issues.

Nonetheless enacting open communication is easier said than done due to the institutional restrictions and the personality of the people involved. Bernal et al. (2004) mentioned that organizational structure and proper coordination were key to their successful communication. Kolb and Gray (2005) wrote that workshops on open communication and skills for collaborative

team work were developed and various stakeholders including the academics were invited and received training through these workshops. They offered a model that they developed and used in their workshops. This model included “shared mission, collective responsibility, necessary resources and responsibility, respectful and supportive climate, awareness of group process, creativity, and capacity to deal with conflict” (p. 249). The content of these workshops were drawn from the purpose of each individual project in which participants shared their ideas and experiences.

Continuous community involvement

In successful partnerships, representatives from the community have been involved from the beginning. Nonetheless, having ongoing community involvement as a principle, does not guarantee the success of the project per se. My findings revealed that the early engagement to a large extent involves identifying the needs and demands of the community and aligning the partnership practices based on those needs. For example, in a study on community outreach and development for medical and social work students, “community diagnosis” was implemented in which the diagnosis was achieved from patient data, HP data, and public health data (Art, De Roo, Willems, & De Maeseneer, 2008). Furthermore, after reaching the diagnosis, the students corroborated the diagnosis with the community. This kind of diagnosis involved the issue that the community as a whole was facing. Not only do the goals of partnership need to be coordinated between university and community, but also coordination and balanced relationship are needed within university departments (Amey et al., 2002). For example, in one project, the students of different fields had different approaches to community outreach and medical students and social work students occasionally encountered problems working together (Art et al., 2008).

Leadership and implementation issues

Leadership and decision-making is a controversial and variable component in C-U partnerships. The articles reviewed emphasized shared leadership between community and university. Zendell et al. (2007) wrote that if the university initiates the project and receives the funding, a “defacto” situation is created in which university is the one with more power. Their project reduced this power imbalance by having a community co-chair in their consortium, committees, and task forces. They were involved in defining competencies, recruited and monitored students and changed policies. Other than engaging the community organizations in the decision-making process, changes within the university are required to fulfill a satisfactory and mutually beneficial partnership. In this regard, Amey et al. (2002) argued that various units within the university need to work in multidisciplinary teams to better address the complexity inherent in community issues. Their project also entailed a paradigm shift in which academics had to relinquish their power and “expert” position and blend their own disciplinary knowledge into a collective knowledge through a team work process. Kolb and Gray (2005) wrote that the nature of organizations are transforming and that the traditional “command-and-control” model is being replaced by the need for “boundaryless” and “network” organizations, characterized by collaborative leadership, team work, and shared resources and knowledge. In their study, institutional change within the university occurred by involving stakeholders across different levels: deans, department heads, faculty, administrators, and undergraduate students.

Roles and responsibilities

In relation to leadership and decision-making issues, the literature depicts what roles and responsibilities were adopted and accomplished by various stakeholders. In general two criteria were suggested regarding to roles and responsibilities: 1) assigning roles based on personal

interest, background, and expertise of each person; 2) allowing boundary spanning across roles. It is not feasible to assign roles regardless of people's background and solely for the purpose of partnership because each individual already has a role in their home institution and agency (Zendell et al., 2007). The literature recommended appealing to expertise, personal interest and intrinsic motivations of people in assuming roles. In a partnership between a university, a community organization, and a warehouse retail, each partner exercised their unique expertise into the process by assuming a relevant role (Price, Zavotka, & Teaford, 2004). Each partner also managed to offer some of their own resources to the partnership. Art et al. (2008) studied a course development project on community diagnosis in primary care and clarified the roles and responsibilities in this process. Patients, carers, and community organization took part in the needs assessment and identified the issues that they wanted to be dealt with in the project. Faculty and students designed the course, and students spent time in the patients' houses and took part in the evaluation. Community staff and community jury took part in assessing students' assignments.

Site

The activities of the projects occur in many different sites including university and community spaces, as well as the homes of the community members. It might appear, at first glance, that site of partnership requires a discussion about university vs. community settings. However, my findings showed the characteristics of the site were most important. Wherever the activities are conducted, it is important to create *a neutral and safe space* in which the partners can efficiently assume and enact their responsibilities (Amey et al., 2002). Another way is for the university to establish sites in the community for conducting the project (Zendell et al., 2007).

Other logistics

Several other factors contributed to the success of partnership. Each project had established their own unique auxiliary processes based on the needs of partnership. One project used multimedia technology to help address the time restriction on the individuals involved (Pardasani, 2005). Larson (2005) used web-based courses that helped culturally diverse students to learn better, because they went over the material as many times as they could. This finding may translate to university-community relationships where the community members find the university's academic jargon to be challenging. The way to address this shortcoming is to send the materials for meetings beforehand, or to have a coordinator or liaison person ready to explain any misunderstandings or miscommunications.

Sustainability

Partnerships, depending on their goals might contain long-term or otherwise short-term relationships. For example, the project that connected Lakota culture with the nursing program at university continued for several years (Larson, 2005). The need for Lakota advisory group became less as the nursing school became familiar with the Lakota culture and had incorporated cultural values in their program over the years. Interestingly, authors mentioned that this project also increased the number of Aboriginal students in the nursing program due to the provision of culture specific materials.

Community and university projects usually have limited and short term funding and budgeting protocols that compromise the sustainability of the projects. The duration of funding is not usually decided by partners, rather, by the larger governance body at the university or by external organizations that provide the funding. A question that remains: What can partners and stakeholders do to help with the sustainability of their projects considering the funding

limitations? The studies that I found suggested at least four factors that if considered by partners, could result in sustainability.

First, sustainability in the literature proved to be a combined outcome of all the criteria discussed above. In other words, components, such as shared mission, recognizing and utilizing diverse forms of expertise, and equal power and equal contribution help with sustaining the relationships. In one project, commitment to care for the citizens, as a shared goal between community and university led to sustainability of partnership (Bernal et al., 2004). Price et al. (2004) described four reasons for sustainability and expansion of their project: diversity of partners, identifying the unique expertise of each, the empowerment of the partners caused by the partnership and collaboration, and a self-sustaining project that could grow without the original creators. Zendell et al. (2007) referred to five factors inherent in discussions around sustainability: the attrition of partners and the need for having new partners, flexibility in goals and roles while keeping the primary goal intact, communication via a variety of method (they argue this is the most essential factor), commitment and support by all partners and sharing resources, and sustaining and securing funding and ways of allocating funds are important factors.

The second factor for sustainability is extension that is discussed in two ways: extending one project to several others and extending the geographical outreach of the partnership. In Levin and Rutkow's (2011) study, inviting the community partners to get involved in various projects (other than the initial one) had helped in sustaining the university partnership with community partners. Anyon and Fernandez (2010) found sustainability through expanded work which resulted in further funding for other projects. Moreover, the geographical extent of the outreach

(outreach expanded state-wide) and the increasing amount of partnerships, expanded the program and hence its sustainability (Price et al., 2004).

The third factor for sustainability is the ongoing presence of the community as board members. McCaslin and Barnstable's (2008) study about geriatric social work, referred to the creation of community advisory boards consisting of organization representatives, practitioners, and elders. The community advisory continued beyond the project and its members often had permanent positions, interacted with faculty and students, assessed and revised course offerings, and involved in field placements. They also represented speakers and panels, and art performances. Even, the advisory groups that did not extend beyond the project contributed to creating sustainable materials such as websites, databases, manuals, and videos. Authors argued that other than sustainability, the advisory boards were beneficial in helping busy people like faculty and practitioners to have a structure to work with and for all partners to engage in frequent face-to-face interaction and exchange of resources. This study also referred to panel of elders that were created to speak to classes. These elders worked as assignment interviewees and curriculum consultants. McCaslin and Barnstable (2008) found that the programs that had community members on them were more likely to continue having a board, and "to report community contributions to the university" (p. 9). These programs also increased the interaction of faculty and students with the community. Also the projects within the community that involved faculty and students, particularly the latter, were more likely to be sustained beyond the initial funding. Moreover the reciprocal partnership between community and university had ongoing student and faculty involvement with the community.

The fourth factor includes having sustainability as a vision from the beginning. In this regard, Anyon and Fernandez (2010) suggested that partners can discuss strategies for

sustainability from the onset of the initiative. This implies that sustainability is significant to the extent that it is included as part of the vision for community-university partnerships.

Discussion

Each of the articles reviewed contained one or more of the components listed above. Creating a partnership that consists of all these components might be more challenging than it sounds. In an ideal world, even if the institutional and funding problems are solved, a number of issues need to be considered in planning such partnerships. The composition of the university and the community needs to be taken into consideration. A mechanism should be in place to identify and illustrate the assets and skills that are held by community and university. The course offerings and curricula might need to change to suit the timeline as well as the needs of community. Both community and university partners need substantial support, dialogue, and preparation in getting ready to step into a new sphere. And, finally, a different education is needed for both university and community partners to realize the importance of these engagements and to know how they each can contribute to this vision.

My review sheds insight into how mutual and reciprocal partnerships are created. The reason why almost 60 out of 76 articles on education models failed to represent reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships can be described in at least two ways. First, the idea of mutually beneficial partnerships is new while universities are still operating with a traditional structure. The universities, to this day, fail to realize the importance of reciprocity in their relationships with the community. This may be partly rooted in the way communities have been perceived as the beneficiary and users of university's service, knowledge and expertise. Second, the scarcity of reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships, is not only a matter of logistics discussed above, but also it should be studied under the prevailing economy and culture that influence

community and university partnerships. Public universities are changing according to governmental administration and sociopolitical changes within the society, as well as the economic changes within the globe. Globalization and a market-driven culture have found their place within private and public domains and institutions. These changes have resulted in reduced public funding of the universities and increased dependence of the universities on the industry and third-party organizations for covering the revenue deficits.

Many of community-university partnerships happen solely for the purpose of research; that by itself is one of the mechanisms of survival in academia. This trend suggests a growing interest in economic development and the lack of concern about the social mission of the universities. In fact, an economy that is driven by profit-seeking ideology and market-driven standards is in conflict with the social mission of the universities (Subotzky, 1999). Therefore, universities are being pushed to follow a double standard: to become genuinely responsible toward their communities and publics or to treat and interact with the community based on financial incentives. Many argue that there is a need for a culture change to enable authentic engagements. However, a culture change within the university may not be feasible given that universities are bound to function in a larger culture that prioritizes economic development over social justice. Nonetheless, a culture change is not a pre-requisite for successful partnerships, but it would likely make recognizing, creating, and sustaining mutually reciprocal partnerships easier.

Limitations

I encountered a number of limitations in conducting my literature review. First, different terminologies regarding community and university partnerships may be used in the literature. I

had to begin with general terms to do my key word search; yet, I wonder if relevant articles exist on reciprocal and mutually partnerships that I missed because they did not use the terminologies that I set for my study. Second, given that the research interest of the author is in health professional education, a bias might exist in this study in selecting articles relevant to health disciplines. Lastly, there is a limitation in the wider literature when looking for articles in community and university partnerships. I observed that the literature was inclined to showcase the university processes and it lacked representations of processes within the community. It appears that the literature contains a large body of education partnership studies that describe the processes of curriculum or course development only (after having identified the needs and concerns of community). The voices of community are missing in these processes. So I encourage future studies to consider including community's perspective as a main contributor to C-U partnerships.

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