RESEARCH ON SERVICE LEARNING

Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment

VOLUME 2B: Communities, Institutions, and Partnerships

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IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research

Stylus

STERLING, VIRGINIA

Published by Stylus Publishing, LLC
22883 Quicksilver Drive
Sterling, Virginia 20166-2102

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Research on service learning : conceptual frameworks and assessment : communities, institutions, and partnerships / edited by Patti H. Clayton, Robert G. Bringle, and Julie A. Hatcher.—1st ed.
v. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-57922-340-3 (v. 1 : cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-57922-341-0 (v. 1 : pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-57922-838-5 (v. 1 : library networkable e-edition)
ISBN 978-1-57922-839-2 (v. 1 : consumer e-edition)
ISBN 978-1-57922-883-5 (v. 2 : cloth)
ISBN 978-1-57922-884-2 (v. 2 : paper)
ISBN 978-1-57922-885-9 (v. 2 : library networkable e-edition)
ISBN 978-1-57922-886-6 (v. 2 : consumer e-edition)
1. Service learning. 2. Service learning—Research.
I. Clayton, Patti H. II. Bringle, Robert G. III. Hatcher, Julie A., 1953–
LC220.5.R476 2013
361.37—dc23 2012020696

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-883-5 (cloth)
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-884-2 (paper)
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-885-9 (library networkable e-edition)
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-57922-886-6 (consumer e-edition)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39-48 Standard.

First Edition, 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN SERVICE LEARNING

Advancing Theory-Based Research

Emily M. Janke

At a state meeting of United Way (UW) directors, Victoria, the executive director of the Umpachene County United Way, learned that many low-income families never receive the thousands of dollars due to them in tax refunds because they do not file their taxes. Working in a rural area with a high poverty rate, Victoria knew that several hundred or thousand dollars would make a significant impact on the quality of life of people in her community. Victoria pitched the idea of developing a local Earned Income Tax Credit Partnership (EITCP) to members of local community-based organizations; this initiative was not to be a UW project but, rather, a partnership of multiple community-based organizations. Additionally, the work of the partnership was to be self-sustaining after three years. Victoria's goal was to recruit vested community partners to leverage support and resources to establish tax preparation sites; the effort would need coordinators, building space, and certified tax preparation volunteers.

In the first year, two community-based organizations joined UW, and this nascent partnership served 41 clients. The partners quickly realized that they could not increase the number of clients served in their rural community without the assistance of students attending nearby colleges; there simply were not enough skilled volunteers in the county otherwise. So Victoria asked Tina, a faculty member in the economics department at Wilken College, to help recruit students. Tina agreed, and by the end of that first tax season, Wilken students had assisted more than 450 families and helped claim $870,000 in tax refunds.

When Victoria announced to the group that she would be stepping down from her leadership role, the partners considered the support they could each expect from their organization as well as the time each had to commit to fulfilling their roles. By the end of the meeting, the group had collectively decided to elect a chair and vice chair of EITCP. The group's success in navigating this transition period strongly suggested that the partnership could endure further changes in resources and personnel. EITCP had become a true partnership entity that was distinct from each of the organizations represented by various individuals.

This story of a partnership (Janke, 2008, 2009) illustrates several levels of relationships that may be present in service learning. At one level, aspects of the partnership are interpersonal. There are interactions and relationships that have been developed among individuals. In meetings to schedule tax assistance appointments for clients, partners considered their calendars outside of their usual working hours (i.e., on their personal time). Many of the partners developed personal relationships with each other. For example, partners frequently asked about each other's lives and families, several meals were shared together after meetings, and one community partner taught another's son to fish during the summer months.

At another level, the partnership in the vignette is interorganizational: It exists as a relationship among organizations. Victoria, as the executive director of the local United Way, convened a meeting of other organizational representatives, including Tina in her role as faculty member. All individuals were invited to the partnership in order to connect the resources of their organizations to support the initiative.

Over time, the partnership came to be established as an organizational, or partnership, entity: the EITCP. Each partner was aware of the specific roles and responsibilities of the organizations that they represented, not only with the direct service provided to clients but also with regard to enacting and preserving the partnership itself. Partners understood that the partnership was intended to endure into the future despite changes in personnel and funding. The partners saw themselves as "we," rather than "us/them"; partners representing different organizations shared a unified mission and norms for behavior within the partnership, and organizational structures were formally established within the partnership entity.

Identifying an organizational-level—rather than only an interpersonal-level—framing (Janke, 2008, 2009) is useful in conducting research into what makes partnerships successful over the long term or, specifically, why service learning faculty and community partners remain together over many years. In the EITCP vignette, members believed adopting formal structures was an essential strategy to ensure that the partnership continued to function effectively, even when individual partners left. They established clear partnership roles and responsibilities and intentionally clarified specific goals and organizational norms to ensure that the partnership could continue despite changes in personnel. What might be learned if partnerships were conceived not only as relationships between individuals but also as relationships between organizations (herein referred to as *interorganizational relationships* [IORs]) or as their own organizational entities (herein referred to as *partnership entities*)? Decades of research and theoretical frameworks from the field of management and organization can contribute lenses for studying and approaches to practicing service learning partnerships not previously explored. This chapter reviews several aspects of IOR and partnership entity research to demonstrate how the scholarship and practice of service learning partnerships may be enhanced by adopting approaches from other fields—the field of management and organization in particular.

Organizations are related to, but ultimately different from, other social relationships because organizations formally prescribe ways of enacting interrelated roles and responsibilities (Simon, 1991). Simon (1991), one of the seminal scholars in organization research, provides a rationale for organizational theory that may resonate with service learning partnership scholars as well:

> We need an organization theory because some phenomena are more conveniently described in terms of organizations and parts of organizations than in terms of individual human beings who inhabit those parts. There is nothing more surprising in the existence of phenomena than in the existence of phenomena that make it convenient for chemists to speak about molecules rather than quarks. Employing a more aggregate level of discourse is not a declaration of philosophical anti-reductionism, but simply a recognition that most natural systems do have hierarchical structure, and that it is sometimes possible to say a great deal about aggregate components without specifying the details of the phenomena going on within these components. (p. 126)

Applied to the study of service learning partnerships, an organizational-level approach enables researchers to study the ways in which information is gathered and used, decisions are made, expectations are established, and actions are undertaken *by organizations* per se. It may also help practitioners become

aware of new ways of approaching planning, managing, and assessing service learning partnerships.

This chapter introduces two key conceptualizations of service learning partnership at the organizational level. Specifically, partnerships may be conceptualized as interorganizational relationships (i.e., relationships between organizations) or as partnership entities (i.e., distinct organizational entities that are, to an extent, separate from the parent organizations from which they originated). These two types of organizational-level framings of partnerships invite researchers to adopt theories, questions, and research strategies that are distinct from those associated with interpersonal relationships (chapter 6.1). The application of paradigms and approaches used by scholars who study organizations and IORs may deepen understanding and improve practice of successful service learning partnerships.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Since Cruz and Giles (2000) called for scholars to advance understanding of service learning partnerships using the partnership itself as the unit of analysis, the body of scholarship related to partnerships has increased substantially. As one example, the book *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning* (Jacoby, 2003) dedicates 15 chapters to exploring foundational principles and describing high-quality partnerships within and across institutions of higher education and across sectors. In another example, the magazine *Partnership Perspectives,* published by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health since 1998, showcases case studies and insights on partnerships related to health and wellness.

Authors and editors apply the term *partnerships* to a wide array of relationships between and among individuals, groups, and organizations as well as in reference to varying types of formal (e.g., contract, memorandum of understanding) and informal (e.g., personal agreements, handshakes) agreements (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). Several authors, however, suggest typologies of service learning partnership to differentiate between types in order to describe the different relationships and activities that are likely to contextualize partnerships. Focused on interinstitutional relationships specifically, Sockett (1998) categorized partnerships according to four levels of trust and complexity:

- *Service* relationships, [in which] an individual or unit volunteers or sells support for an institution-related function;

- *Exchange* relationships, [in which] the parties exchange resources for their mutual benefit;
- *Cooperative* relationships, [in which] the parties plan together and share responsibilities; and
- *Systemic and Transformative* relationships, [in which] the parties share responsibility for planning, decision making, funding, operations, and evaluation of activities and in which each institution is transformed through the relationship. (p. 76)

Sockett emphasized that the "typology is not a hierarchy" and that "it is not necessary that any particular partnership begin in a service relationship and work its way upward" (p. 76) toward, for example, a systemic and transformative partnership. This typology of interinstitutional partnerships is useful in that it allows differentiation among types of partnerships to examine the foundational characteristics, processes, and outcomes that may be associated with each type.

What Is an Organization?

Defining the features that all organizations have in common is a topic of debate among scholars (Scott, 2003). However, most scholars agree that in its simplest definition, organizations are "social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals" (Scott, p. 11). Organizations are more formally structured than social groups that coordinate around shared interests because their goals are highly specified and their work processes are highly formalized (Scott, 2003). Leaders of organizations must coordinate, or organize, to address key issues, including defining goals, training and inducing participants to contribute services, securing resources, and delivering products or services (Scott, 2003). These elements are shown in Leavitt's (1965) model of the central components that constitute organizations: *participants* (individuals who contribute to the work of the organization), *social structure* (formal and informal values, norms, and role expectations that guide participants' actions), *goals* (the desired ends that the organization expects to achieve), and *technology* (the processes and mechanisms needed to do the work of the organization). These elements are influenced by and respond to external pressures; a core purpose is to preserve the organization.

Potential Benefits of Organizational-Level Partnerships

Developing relationships that have organizational-level memberships, rather than merely individual relationships, is thought, implicitly if not explicitly, to help ensure the long-term viability of service learning collaborations. For example, Pickeral (2003) established a list of characteristics of partnerships between K–12 schools and higher education institutions. This list suggests strategies that are organizational in nature, namely, that the partners should develop "systemic policies, practices, and infrastructure [to] secure sustainability" (p. 174). Embedded in these recommended practices for service learning partnerships is the notion that formalizing organizational structures will enhance the ability of the partnership to endure regardless of future challenges.

Likewise, the literature in the field of management and organization also suggests that an organizational relationship is likely to be more durable, reliable, accountable than a relationship between individuals (Scott, 2003). First, organizations, on the whole, are *durable* in the sense that they are expected to persist over time and thus are structured so as to endure despite changing participants, resources, and external pressures. Because they are made up of collectives of individuals, unless all members leave the organization and none are recruited to take their places, the organization exists even as members may change.

Second, organizations are *reliable* to the extent that they tend to enact the same operations or activities repeatedly and become relatively good at those tasks. Formalized structures, norms, rules, and routines contribute to their tendency to engage reliably in the same type of work. For example, a school will reliably continue to teach students because its mission and other formalized structures are set up for that particular activity.

Finally, organizations are *accountable* in the sense that guidelines, policies, and legal codes help to ensure that work is performed according to certain standards and procedures. Although there is certainly variation in the degree to which standards and procedures are followed, organizations are generally more formally accountable than individuals acting independently. Exceptions may certainly exist, and some interpersonal partnerships may be more durable, reliable, and accountable than some organizational-level partnerships, but the collective nature of organizations and the reification of structures that make them durable, reliable, and accountable suggest that they tend to be relatively sustainable over time.

Differentiating Between IORs and Partnership Entities

The study of relationships between organizations is increasingly common in the literature on industry as well as in the literature on the areas of management and organization, strategy, and international business (Gulati, 1995;

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Salk & Shenkar, 2001). The proliferation of interorganizational linkages over the past two-plus decades (Zajac & Olsen, 1993), as well as the demise of nearly half of those partnerships (Park & Ungson, 1997), has sparked an interest in understanding the factors that affect partners' commitments to achieve the stated goals of the partnership. Important insights may be gained from this literature and used to inform research on service learning partnerships, particularly conceptual and practical differences between IORs and partnerships that are created as or evolve to become partnership entities.

In the field of management and organization, scholars study multiple types of relationships based on the level to which organizations commit responsibility and resources. Beyond client-customer relationships, in which products are sold or services are rendered, common partnership relationships include strategic alliances (an agreement is established to cooperate on a substantial level), joint ventures (a new legal entity is formed between two or more companies), and mergers and acquisitions (two or more companies become one company). In a *strategic alliance*, the relationship involves two or more organizations that come together for a specific and limited purpose. However, the parent organizations (i.e., the organizations that come together in partnership) remain separate from one another. In a *joint venture*, partnering organizations develop an entity that is separate from the parent organizations. The joint venture may have goals, activities, funding structures, and personnel that are distinct from those of the parent organizations. In a *merger* or an *acquisition*, partnering organizations join to become a single legal entity, either by both unifying in a new structure (the former) or by one being restructured into the other (the latter). Service learning partnerships between institutions of higher education and community organizations are not likely to result in a merger, though it may be possible for a partnership to be acquired by one of the partnering organizations. Organizational structures and personnel may be realigned to develop a single entity. Differences between these types of unions become important not only for legal purposes but also because the different structures provide different mental models or frames for how boundary spanners who serve as organizational representatives work together (Williams, 2002).

Applying the terms just described, the vignette of the EITCP partnership can be described as going through two states. In its initial state, the partnership relationship was similar to a strategic alliance. Organizational representatives came together for a defined, limited, and specific purpose. They developed a roster of the organizational representatives and examined it to ensure that participants from key stakeholder groups (local banks, the

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American Association of Retired Persons, and other community-based and community-serving organizations) were represented. However, the relationship developed into an organizational form similar to a joint venture as members took steps to formalize the partnership as an organizational entity. For example, bylaws established membership and voting rights, and formal titles were established for the chair, co-chair, secretary, and treasurer (social structure). One of the partnering organizations dedicated the time of a part-time staff member for several months of the year to coordinate the materials, space, and volunteers for the EITCP program (technology). The members of the partnership developed a logo to represent the union to external stakeholders; they also produced promotional materials publicly stating the specific purpose of the partnership (goals). The partnership can be described as having transitioned from an IOR in which partners participated solely as representatives from separate organizations to a partnership entity in which members, to some extent, identified with and invested in the partnership entity itself (Janke, 2008).

Review of Research Studies and Methods

Once scholars and practitioners have distinguished between IORs and partnership entities, the next step is to consider how these two types of organizational-level relationships can be studied. This section offers some starting points, drawn from the author's review of management and organizational literature from the field on the topics of IORs and partnership entities. Although it is not possible to portray the full breadth and depth of the field, examples drawn from extant research may offer a compelling reason to examine closely this and other literature and to adopt, adapt, and build on foundations that have already been laid in this area of scholarship and practice.

Interorganizational Relationships

An important feature of research and scholarship on IORs is the careful attention paid to understanding the factors present in different stages or phases of the relationship, including pre-partnering characteristics of organizations; processes that occur during the formation, development, and maintenance of the relationship; and outcomes. Differentiating among relationship phases allows scholars to develop a clearer understanding of what aspects of IORs play key roles in the success or failures of unions.

Pre-Partnering Characteristics

A significant body of research that is present in the management and organization literature, but largely absent from the service learning literature, focuses on the importance of pre-partnering characteristics that affect the likelihood of organizations developing partnership relationships (Oliver, 1990). More than two decades ago, Oliver (1990) distilled the key antecedents of IOR formation into six fundamental and sufficient determinants:

1. *Necessity*: the extent to which mandatory or regulatory requirements (in contrast to voluntary associations) require partnering
2. *Asymmetry*: the extent to which scarce resources are secured and market power is increased
3. *Reciprocity*: the extent to which common or mutually beneficial goals and interests are pursued
4. *Efficiency*: the extent to which internal input/output ratio is improved
5. *Stability*: the extent to which predictability and dependability in relation to others is achieved
6. *Legitimacy*: the extent to which the organization appears in agreement with prevailing norms, rules, beliefs, or expectations of external constituents

These characteristics are generalizable across organizations, settings, and types of partnerships (i.e., strategic alliances, joint ventures, mergers). Although each characteristic may provide distinct and sufficient cause of relationship formation, Oliver suggests that most IORs are built based on multiple determinants.

Oliver's (1990) list of six pre-partnering characteristics has been carefully constructed and has received substantial peer review; this piece of scholarship has been cited more than 400 times in journals within a range of fields, including organizational management, nonprofit voluntary sectors, social and organizational psychology, and public administration (Social Science Citation Index from Web of Science). The list has informed the development of formal theory (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994) as well as empirical research (Doz, 1996; Gulati, 1998; Marchington & Vincent, 2004; Williams, 2002; Wohlstetter, Smith, & Malloy, 2005). Given the robust nature of this body of scholarship, it is quite likely that service learning partnership researchers may have much to learn by considering organizations' pre-partnership characteristics and developing well-defined constructs and measures to study them.

Processes

A good match based on antecedent conditions does not in and of itself definitively ensure the success of a partnership (Güney, 2005; Marchington & Vincent, 2004; Oliver, 1990). If that were the case, why would not every jointly conceived partnership between organizations last as long as, or be as successful as, all partners desire? The reason is that human and organizational factors that occur throughout the duration of the partnership affect the ability, as well as the desire, of individual persons, including as representatives of organizations, to remain in partnership (Bartel, 2001; Robertson, 1998; Williams, 2002).

Increasingly IOR scholars draw attention to the processes that occur between boundary spanners once the partnership has begun (e.g., Austin, 2000; Phillips & Graham, 2000; Rapp & Whitfield, 1999). Although a comparison of service learning partnership literature and IOR literature reveals that many similar processes—such as learning, trust, and power sharing (Scheibel, Bowley, & Jones, 2005; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Todd, Ebata, & Hughes, 1998; White, 2006)—are important to partnership success, IOR studies tend to isolate these various processes in order to clearly define, operationalize, and study how particular constructs interact with each other and affect particular outcomes. Importantly, these constructs are explored at the organizational level. For example, it is not assumed that trust between organizations is the same process as trust between individuals, and vice versa.

This point is illustrated by how organizational learning and trust are defined and examined in the IOR literature. For example, *organizational learning* is clearly differentiated from learning that happens on the part of individuals (Sobrero & Roberts, 2001). An organization, Simon (1991) suggests, learns as knowledge is stored in the minds of its members, is transmitted to others, or is "stored in ways that will permit it to be recovered when relevant" (p. 126). Through sharing ideas and experiences, "[partners] learn to appreciate and use multiple sources of knowledge, problem solving is enhanced, and relationships deepen" (Kari & Skelton, 2010, p. 182).

Organizational learning is important in partnerships between organizations because it not only enhances the ability of partners to manage the project effectively and to accomplish shared goals but also helps to "equalize power differences associated with expert knowledge" (Kari & Skelton, 2010, p. 182). Although the initial conditions of an IOR may facilitate or hamper interorganizational learning, strong cooperative strategic alliances evolve if the partner organizations learn together (Doz, 1996). Learning about environments, tasks, processes, skills, and goals allows the necessary reevaluation, readjustment, and revision of effective IORs.

Additionally, establishing *trust* between organizations is an important part of the IOR process that may improve the likelihood that IORs will achieve their objectives (Gulati, 1995; Inkpen & Currall, 2004; Kwon, 2008). The management literature includes two understandings of interorganizational trust (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). One definition of trust emphasizes a risk-based view wherein trust exists to the extent that parties believe that the other(s) will not act opportunistically. In a risk-based view, partners take actions to protect against risks through formal contracts, agreements, and insurance (Inkpen & Currall, 2004). Organizational partners without established relationships are likely to assume a risk-based approach to protect the assets of the organizations (Doz & Hamel, 1998).

A second definition of trust in the management literature emphasizes faith in the goodwill and moral integrity of others. A goodwill-based view of trust tends to be produced through interpersonal relationships between individual partners who establish mutual norms, sentiments, and friendships (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Although this type of trust is enacted at the interpersonal level, relationships may, ultimately, "be conditioned by legal systems or organizational roles and responsibilities, mitigating the ability of the parties to rely on [goodwill-based] trust as a matter of first preference" (p. 93) and, instead, incorporate a risk-based approach to partnering. Therefore, interpersonal relationships and organizational structures interact with each other such that interpersonal relationships can shape and modify the structure of an interorganizational partnership, and organizational structures can shape and modify the type of trust established between individual partners (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994).

Outcomes

The final phase, the outcome, of an IOR is an essential aspect of partnerships and, therefore, is key to understanding partnerships as well. Whether organizational partners are able to achieve the outcomes they intend is a key determinant of whether a business partnership has been successful (Human & Provan, 2000) and is linked to both trust (i.e., that the partner can deliver the service, role, or product initially agreed upon) (Inkpen & Currall, 2004) and reasons for the partners coming together in the first place (Oliver, 1990). For example, that the partnership has maximized profits, increased economic stability, added value (economic or otherwise), or provided a social service sufficiently is an important considerations in whether a partnership is deemed a worthwhile enterprise. Focusing attention on the outcomes, in addition to the processes followed, is important to the scholarship and practice of service learning partnerships as well because university and community partners want to know that their partnerships are contributing to their individual and shared aims (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Ultimately, partners want to know that the time, energy, and resources invested in the partnership make a difference.

Partnership Entities

Whereas some organizations strategically ally with each other, others develop joint ventures in which the resultant partnership entity is distinct from the parent organizations. The development of partnership entities is useful to achieve specific goals through establishing personnel, policies, technologies, and funding to coordinate and carry out the activities of the partnership.

Drawing from management and organizational research, one strand of research that may help to inform scholarship on and practice of service learning partnerships centers on how members' perceptions of "who we are" as an organization—its organizational origin and identity—affect how they interact with each other and act on behalf of the organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Haslam, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Organizational identity is a theory based on the premise that an organization has "the identity of a collective actor" (Whetten, 2006, p. 221), which is held in the minds of and enacted by organizational members. Similar to individuals having identities (i.e., that which describes who "I" am), organizations also have identities (i.e., "who we are as a collective") (Whetten, 2006).

Organizational identity consists of those features of an organization that are central (that which members perceive as core or fundamental to the organization), enduring (that which members perceive as the lasting features of the organization), and distinctive (that which members perceive as different from other organizations). That which members believe is central, enduring, and distinctive to the organization serves as a referent when representatives act or speak on behalf of the organization. Identity is important because members of organizations attend to that which is most congruent with who, or what, they believe the identity of the organization to be and tend to ignore or dismiss that which is not (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

The extent to which members of an organization, and, by extension, a partnership entity, see themselves as working together as members of a single collective (organizational unit) who are in pursuit of shared goals and obey common norms may affect their ability to work collaboratively and effectively. For example, Güney (2005) studied two previously distinct suborganizations within a large technology corporation. Participants from different suborganizations had difficulty working together to achieve common objectives, such as writing a product development plan. Because participants originated from different suborganizational contexts with different structures and norms, they were more concerned with establishing what the collaborative group was to be about and what type of relationship they wanted to have with each other in the pursuit of their goals than with the goals themselves. It was not until participants developed a shared organizational identity that they were able to work together effectively. At the conclusion of her ethnographic case study, Güney found that collaboration depended on the members' construction of a shared sense of organizational identity of "who we are and what we are doing together" (p. 20).

Further research supports the role that a shared organizational identity may play in the ability of organizational members to work effectively together. Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, and Thomas's (2010) research on the transitional identity developed during the initial phases of a merger between two formerly rival health care organizations suggests the significant role of identity in understanding the factors involved in successful unions. In their study the emerging transitional identity was described as the "interim sense held by members about what their organizations were becoming" (p. 397). The transitional identity played a significant role in the ability of the organizational members to "suspend their preexisting organizational identities and work toward creating a shared, new identity" (p. 397). The authors posited that a shared or aligned identity may be an essential first step in maximizing functioning and productivity in a new organizational union.

Exploring service learning partnerships that are entities unto themselves is a new line of research that has recently been borrowed from the field of management and organization and introduced into the service learning literature (Janke, 2009). Using theories of social identity, organizational identity, boundary spanning, and negotiation as foundations for the conceptual framework, Janke conducted case studies of five faculty-community partnerships to explore the extent to which and conditions under which partners developed a collective and coherent sense of who they were as a partnership distinct from their employing organizations.

Analysis of the partnerships revealed four characteristics of partnership identity that were present in three of the five service learning partnerships:

(a) a unified mission, (b) an expressed sense of "we" rather than "us and them," (c) organizational structures for the partnership itself, and (d) a belief that the partnership would last beyond the current project or task (Janke, 2008). Partnerships exhibiting these characteristics also developed norms for partners behavior that encouraged caring for each other and that nurtured continuing relationships. Partnerships with identities had established shared rules, norms, and structures that governed the interactive processes that were essential to effective interorganizational collaboration. Similar to research in the management and organization field, the study found that as partners established a shared understanding of "who we are" as a unified organizational entity, they were likely to deemphasize power imbalance and unique missions and to focus instead on relatively equal status, joint participation, shared problem solving, and information exchange (Clark et al., 2010; Gricar & Brown, 1981).

By comparing partnerships that had developed shared identities with those that had not, Janke (2008, 2009) analyzed the conditions that foster development of a partnership identity. These include faculty members who feel vested in the community in which the partnership operates, community partners who undertake educator roles, and communication between partners about sharing credit and future projects. Individuals' personal identities may also be an important factor; therefore, individual as well as organizational factors may interact or, at the very least, are present in significant ways that must be explored in research service learning partnerships.

Ultimately, this study suggested that partnerships that develop an identity may be likely to last beyond the present project; endure changes in persons and resources; and transform how partners view each other, the partnership, and even their employing institutions (Janke, 2008). Partners are committed to the endurance and goals of the partnership itself, much as Dorado and Giles (2004) found that partners in a "committed" (p. 25) partnership nurtured the partnership beyond the level required to facilitate the completion of the project. For example, partners may invite each other to special events or assist one another on other projects. Partners who nurture the partnership itself, beyond a focus on achieving project goals, demonstrate by doing so a shared sense of "who we are as a partnership."

Implications for Practice

As demonstrated by the opening vignette, the organizational levels of partnerships—interorganizational and partnership entity—interact with one another and with the interpersonal level of relationships; thus, the difficulty of categorizing a given service learning partnership should not be underestimated. After all, organizations comprise not only goals, technologies, roles, and responsibilities but also individuals who have unique personalities, perspectives, and relationships.

The role of individuals who interact with representatives from outside organizations for the purpose of initiating and facilitating a partnership is a rich area of research (Wood & Gray, 1991). A variety of practical challenges are raised when individuals speak or act on behalf of their organizations in boundary-spanning roles (Clark et al., 2010; Williams, 2002; Wood & Gray, 1991). Boundary spanners are representatives who are responsible for managing networks of people, building relationships among a wide range of partners, making decisions through negotiating and brokering, mobilizing resources (including partners' time and efforts on behalf of their organizations), and performing the role of "policy entrepreneur" to connect problems to solutions (Williams, 2002, p. 121). Although boundary spanners interact person to person, as in interpersonal relationships, their perceptions and behaviors are strongly shaped by their relationship to their employing organization. Although they maintain personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, culture), the behaviors of boundary spanners are contextualized, guided, and reified by organizational structures and identities (Giddens, 1984; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Porras & Robertson, 1992).

Several research studies have demonstrated that some boundary spanners may experience role tensions—feelings of uncertainty regarding whose interests to serve—when working closely with boundary spanners from other organizations (Noble & Jones, 2006). Boundary spanners who work at their partnering organizations' facilities or who spend a great deal of time immersed in the culture of the organizational partners are likely to experience increased awareness of and sensitivity to the issues, contexts, and pressures of those organizations, which may ultimately affect how they negotiate their boundary-spanning roles. In some instances, boundary spanners' loyalties may expand to include the partnership as an entity in its own right to the "point where their loyalty 'rolls over' to the [partnership] . . . and they find themselves representing the [partnership] as an entity within their own organization" (p. 913). In such cases, boundary spanners are members of their host organization and the partnership.

From a practical point of view, determining whether a partnership is an IOR or a partnership entity—or a personal relationship between individuals—can be challenging because of the interplay between personal and organizational factors (Janke, 2008; Hess et al., 2011). The EITCP example points to this occurrence as the departure of the UW executive director, and later the faculty partner, evoked the question: Who is represented at the table? If the answer is "me," then it is likely that the individual partners will make the assumption that when they leave the partnership, the resources that they represent (e.g., knowledge, skills, students, funds) will also leave with them. However, if they are more formally representing an organization, then when they leave, they may assume that their organization's internal systems will operate so as to fulfill the organization's accountability to the partnership by, for example, appointing a replacement. In the EITCP example, UW and Wilken College each remained a partner in the partnership despite the departure of an individual representative. Hence, the intention to depart or the actual departure of a partner may serve as a critical incident, a moment when the level of membership is questioned and ultimately clarified. Moments such as these can create space for intentional dialogue between partners about whether the partnership is (or should become) an IOR or a partnership entity rather than remain a relationship that exists only between individuals.

Similarly, in Hess et al.'s (2011) recounting of a partnership focused on land preservation and management, the partners indicate that their voluntary base and leadership was the "greatest challenge," as well as the "greatest strength," to the sustainability and long-term success of the partnership (p. 372). The partners state, "We have committed and passionate personal members—a great strength—but we are vulnerable if someone leaves because we do not yet have committed organizational members—a significant weakness" (p. 372). Therefore, the partners conclude that it may be beneficial to the effectiveness and endurance of a partnership to involve multiple representatives from organizations or, at the very least, to develop clear partnership roles that can be filled by others within the organizations in the event of an individual partner's sustained absence.

Future Research Agenda

Studying service learning partnerships at the organizational level is especially difficult because the unit of analysis is a collective entity, a "collective actor" (Whetten, 2006, p. 221). Therefore, who speaks for an organization is not always clear, particularly in the case of service learning partnerships, in which boundary spanners are often not formally designated but are faculty who elect to engage on behalf of their students, their institutions, and themselves.

Furthermore, partnerships continually evolve as individuals change roles; norms and structures evolve, and goals are amended or changed entirely as a result of fluctuating external pressures such as finances, policies, and leadership. Extant bodies of scholarship provide useful tools for exploring characteristics, processes, and outcomes as well as the implications of partnerships enacted at an organizational level.

Pre-Partnering Characteristics

How can research service learning partnerships be enhanced by a deeper and more rigorous analysis of why organizations join together in pursuit of shared goals? Oliver's (1990) six conditions for IOR formation (i.e., necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity/mutual benefit, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy) provide an important starting point from which to understand the extent to which each of the specific variables may serve as precursors to successful service learning partnerships. For example, how, if at all, do the reasons for which partners enter into a partnership affect the processes followed or the outcomes achieved? Are successful outcomes (as defined by the partners) more likely if all partners have the same or different reasons for partnering? Are there conditions for IOR formation in service learning partnerships that are different from the six listed by Oliver? Understanding the reasons why service learning partners come together may be helpful in exploring the extent to which similarities and differences affect the processes followed or the outcomes produced.

Processes

Trust is a common key element described in effective service learning partnerships (Rubin, 2000). With few exceptions (e.g., Sockett, 1998), trust is not clearly defined and the conditions for achieving it are not explicated. Research in the management and organization literature suggests that trust would be defined and enacted differently in a partnership between a single faculty member and a community colleague than in one comprising multiple organizations that are joined in a formal partnership entity. Future research should consider how trust evolves over time, not only as the level of trust increases or decreases but also as it transitions between types, such as between risk-based and goodwill-based frames. If memoranda of understanding and contracts are indicative of a risk-based view (Inkpen & Currall, 2004), then do institutional policies that require such documents inadvertently push service learning faculty, staff, students, and community partners into a relational stance that conveys a lack of trust? Further exploration of trust, therefore, may help improve understanding of how institutional policies can affect the nature of partnerships. Research should explore how, if at all, trusting someone with whom one has a personal relationship is different from trusting an organizational representative whose reasons for partnering may transcend personal interests or passions.

Outcomes

Principles of community engagement, particularly the importance of reciprocity and mutual benefit, are often adopted as a guiding lens in the study and practice of service learning partnerships (Gass, 2010). High-quality service learning partnerships are generally thought to enact values related to social justice, democracy, and reciprocity and, therefore, to include the development of mutual agendas, common understandings of resources and capacities of partners, equitable oversight and control of projects, ongoing assessment of processes and outcomes, and attention to the relationship (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Connors & Seifer, 2002; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Greene-Moton, 2003; Holland, 2005; Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009; Todd et al., 1998; Torres & Schaffer, 2000).

Although foundational principles of service learning are important (see Jacoby, 2003 for further discussion), there is a risk of them being reified at the expense of an equally important focus on outcomes. The reason for the emphasis on particular processes in examining partnerships, Sockett (1998) suggests, is that the practice of community-engaged partnerships is based in moral, social, and political beliefs. ''Partnerships, at any level,'' he writes, ''have to be seen first and foremost as moral frames within which individuals meet, work, and establish common purposes, not as pragmatic political treaties between institutions'' (p. 76). The result, Sockett argues, is that the moral, social, and political beliefs that undergird community engagement trump ''the convention of linking work to existing literature on collaboration and partnership'' (p. 75). Although the principles are certainly important, what might be added to the service learning partnership literature if practitioner-scholars undertake studies that critically examine outcomes in addition to the enactment of principles?

To advance research on service learning partnerships, scholars may look to additional paradigms, models, and ways of empirically testing dimensions of IORs and partnership entities to develop explanations regarding what types of partnerships exist and, further, what types of partnerships lead to what types of outcomes. For example, are IORs in which the members follow key principles for service learning, such as reciprocity, more or less likely to endure beyond the current project and take on new projects than those that do not enact such principles? Are IORs in which members openly discuss how credit and recognition will be shared in media coverage or how resources will be shared more likely to result in better student learning? Clearly defining the connections between the processes followed and the outcomes achieved (e.g., projects completed, lessons learned, scholarship generated, social impact made) may be especially important for service learning advocates when speaking to critics or skeptics (e.g., regarding collaborative advantage for institutions to engage in supporting and practicing community-engaged teaching and scholarship). Effective assessment and research on partnerships at any level is essential to, as Holland (2001) suggests, "ensure consistent quality of effort and experience, build the body of knowledge about best practices, develop the evidentiary argument for additional resources, motivate others to participate by documenting outcomes, and generate ideas and lessons learned to share with others" (p. 53). Although reciprocity and mutual benefit are essential values in service learning partnerships, particularly for their moral and philosophical implications, research that demonstrates collaborative advantage, practically speaking, will undoubtedly increase and expand service learning advocates' ability to make their case.

Critical Incidents

One strategy for advancing understanding of the various levels at which partnerships function and how, if at all, they evolve (or regress) from one level to another is to explore critical incidents (i.e., tension points). When partners move from experiencing the partnership as something that "I" do to something that "we" do as an organization is an example of a rich critical incident. How does that transition happen? Is it linear? What is the role of individuals within a partnership that is becoming interorganizational?

Other critical incidents that may help to reveal the various levels of partnerships may include giving credit or recognition to partners and partnering organizations (e.g., media, public relations, branding), developing formal structures to guide the activities of the partnership (bylaws, committee membership, governance structure), navigating the entry or leave taking of individuals, changing the scope of partnership activities, and discussing long-term planning for the partnership.

Partnership Entity

The notion that participants in a work group or partnership may develop a shared group identity is found throughout the literature on collaboration (Beech & Huxham, 2003; Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005; Huxham & Vangen, 2005) and on higher education–community partnerships (Enos & Morton, 2003; Palermo, McGranaghan, & Travers, 2006). For example, Enos and Morton (2003) suggest that partners in transformative partnerships develop a "group identity in larger definition of community" (p. 25). That is, faculty develop a sense of who they are in partnership with community members, taking into account not only academic interests such as teaching and research but also the concerns and questions of the community. Palermo et al. (2006) infer the presence of a shared group identity in their discussion about developing a partnership as more than "a coalition or information-sharing group" (para. 3 of Unit 3, Section 3.3). However, these authors do not explicate what it means to have a shared identity or even at what level (interpersonal, interorganizational, partnership entity) that identity might emerge. What are the factors that contribute to members of a partnership entity developing a shared sense of "who we are" and, further, what are the outcomes of developing such an identity? Initial research suggests that partnerships with identities are likely to continue despite changes in personnel and resources but does not suggest that they are more likely than those without a partnership identity to achieve community partners' goals for the shared project or to improve student learning outcomes (Janke, 2008). Establishing theories and research that explain why and how partnership entities are successful in achieving the goals of the partners will be especially important to help facilitate long-lasting and multifaceted partnerships.

Conclusion

In her reflection on the core features of community-campus partnerships, Holland (2005) states, "Outstanding work has been done over the last decade to explore the characteristics of effective partnerships. Various individuals and organizations have thoroughly examined partnership experiences and documented their perspectives on the elements associated with satisfaction, mutual benefit and sustainability" (p. 12). However, Holland also suggests that most of these recommendations were "developed independently of one another and rarely built on other works or previously synthesized models," with the result that "there are a number of models of effective partnerships in the literature, but still no sense of broad consensus about their implementation" (p. 12). The diversity of conceptualizations about what constitutes a partnership leaves a fragmented and limited understanding of service learning partnerships.

To improve what is empirically known about effective service learning partnerships, a narrowing, or dividing, within the study of community-campus partnerships may be needed to allow for more effective clarity in researching the factors and processes that affect outcomes (chapter 6.1). Splitting, or differentiating, the field into taxonomies of partnership types may allow for concentrated efforts that provide a greater depth of research and understanding. Narrowing the breadth of research questions within the field to consider the antecedents, processes, and outcomes required for successful collaborations will be important, as will the ability to distinguish among the various levels (i.e., interpersonal, interorganizational, entity) at which partnerships occur.

Though not an exhaustive review, the examples provided in this chapter illustrate the importance and potential of an organizational level of framing of service learning partnerships. Attending to the distinct differences between the two types of partnerships at the organizational level suggests the importance of conceptual clarity in how partnerships are studied. Adapting concepts, frameworks, and methodological approaches from other fields that have long traditions of exploring partnerships at the organizational level is likely to significantly inform and enhance research on service learning partnerships.

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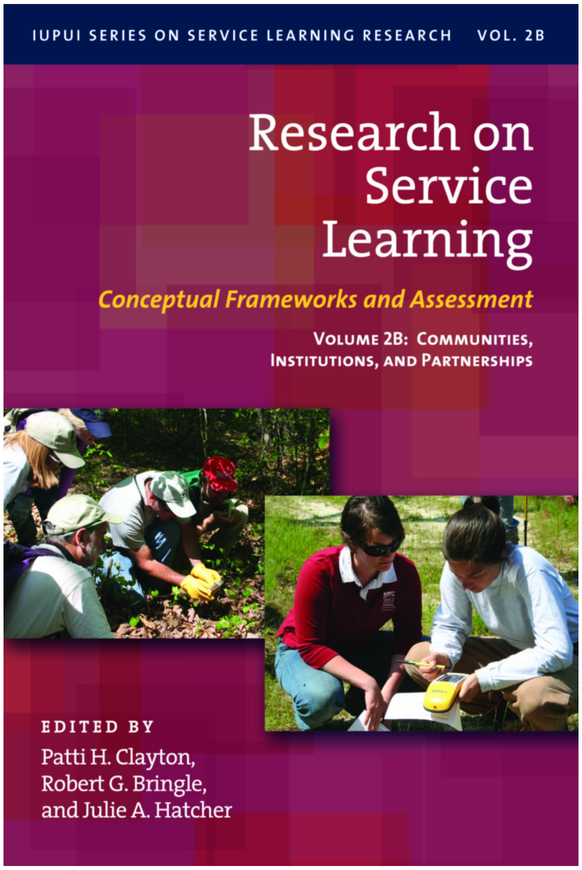

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RESEARCH ON SERVICE LEARNING

Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment Volume 2B: Communities, Institutions, and Partnerships

Edited by Patti H. Clayton, Robert G. Bringle, and Julie A. Hatcher

The purpose of this work is to improve service learning research and practice through strengthening its theoretical base. Contributing authors include both well-known and emerging service learning and community engagement scholars, as well as scholars from other fields. The authors bring theoretical perspectives from a wide variety of disciplines to bear as they critically review past research, describe assessment methods and instruments, develop future research agendas, and consider implications of theory-based research for enhanced practice.

Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment will be of interest to both new and veteran service learning instructors seeking to enhance their practice by integrating what has been learned in terms of teaching, assessment, and research. Staff and faculty who are responsible for promoting and supporting service learning at higher education institutions, evaluating community service programs, and working with faculty to develop research on service learning, will also find this volume helpful. For scholars and graduate students reviewing and conducting research related to service learning, this book is a comprehensive resource, and a knowledge base about the processes and outcomes of innovative pedagogies, such as service learning, that will enable them to locate their own work in an expanding and deepening arena of inquiry.