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Relational Dimensions of Service-Learning: Common Ground for Faculty, Students, and Community Partners

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Study reveals primary dimensions of the relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners in service-learning.

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Abstract

Instructors, students, and community partners often live in separate "discourse communities." The authors conducted a study to investigate the issues at stake in the relationships among those three primary players in service-learning. Analysis of interviews with student-participants in service-learning yielded four primary dimensions of those relationships: Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight. These were advanced as the beginning of a common language for bridging the disconnect among those separate discourse communities. Role theory was used as a context for the results and to frame remedies in terms of role boundary expansion. The authors offered practical suggestions to practitioners as well as directions for future research.

Practitioners and administrators of community service-learning often sense that the three essential participants–faculty, students, and community partners–are not on the same page. Faculty members and community partners may have different objectives in mind for the students. Students' expectations of their service may differ from that of the personnel at the service site or their instructors. Ferrari and Worrall (2000, citing Noley, 1977) have voiced an oft-heard complaint, that community partners "feel that students come ill-prepared to perform service by not having appropriate skills or [having] unrealistic expectations about their duties" (p. 36). Ill-prepared students who bring unrealistic expectations of their service to the work site create an immediate problem for the community partner. Ill-prepared students cannot adequately serve the clients of the community based organization, and students may resist work assignments they did not expect. Such negative working relationships minimize the likelihood of creating the long-term partnerships necessary for substantive contributions to the community.

In an essay valuable for its historical significance as well as its prescience, Tice (1994) articulated the kinds of challenges encountered when the then-new National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 brought together students, community service agencies, and all levels of educators in new working relationships. She said, "Integrating highly motivated but inexperienced community servers into existing programs will require an investment of time and energy, an openness to change, and a dedication to making it work. Realistically, there are few 'magic mixes' where people begin on the same wavelength and continue

over time sharing the same expectations and working styles" (p. 106). Now 15 years later, the service-learning community still faces the challenge of getting those three main players on the "same wavelength." The disconnect lingers. Tice even noted several perennial issues faced by practitioners, e.g.: How can already understaffed agencies provide adequate training and supervision of those community service students? How shall the community agency's role in student learning be regarded and appreciated? Both of these challenges require the kind of close collaboration often missing from the faculty-students-community partners equation. In this study our objectives are to begin to develop (1) a language for talking about those key relationships; (2) an understanding of the disconnect from the student perspective; and (3) some practical suggestions for practitioners and researchers.

Rationale for the Study

One way to frame the oft-encountered disconnect between universities and community partners is to note the different views they bring to service-learning, their inherently different agendas and priorities. Bacon (2002) has characterized community partners and universities as two different "discourse communities," each with its language for talking about knowing and learning. For example, faculty members in her focus groups tended to frame learning as expertise garnered from study, whereas community partners tended to frame learning as a continual activity acquired through experience. Faculty members sought evidence of successful learning in students' ability to articulate that learning in words, and community partners sought evidence of successful learning in students' ability to take effective action. Representatives of both groups spoke of learning as both individual and collaborative, but community partners gave priority to group collaborative learning, and faculty members gave priority to learning as a solitary activity.

A number of studies reporting program assessments have revealed the same kinds of perspectival differences. Gelmon et al. (1998) found that the students', community partners', and faculty members' reflections all noted "the importance of student preparation and

orientation to the social milieu of the partner organization prior to involvement in service-learning activities" (p. 102). Community partners in particular called for "better advance communication and orientation to service-learning between the university and the partner" (p. 103). The implication is that each of the three major players in service-learning brings a deficit of information (and perhaps appreciation) for the place, perspectives, and practices of the other.

Bushouse (2005) has reported on a graduate course in nonprofit management. One major finding from the course evaluations was the students' appreciation of having a memorandum of understanding to guide their service-learning work. "This clarity in expectations prevented time-consuming negotiations between students and community nonprofit organizations to define projects and renegotiate projects throughout the semester, and decreased the potential for mismatched expectations when the project was finished" (p. 38). The memorandum clearly lessened the original disparity in information and expectations among the three players.

The perspective of the community partner was the specific focus of the study by Vernon and Ward (1999). The researchers cited several examples that readers may recognize. One agency director reported not knowing what her responsibilities were regarding the students who came to her adult learning program. Others reported not knowing which students (among all those doing community service at their sites) were doing a service-learning project as opposed to simply volunteering. One especially conscientious agency director indicated that knowing whether students were there as part of a class would make a difference in the kind of tasks assigned to them.

The service site is a nexus of relationships that must work together harmoniously if the community service-learning is to be successful. Like Bingle and Hatcher (2002), Cooks and Scharrer (2006) affirm the wisdom of investigating the interactive relationship among the essential players in the service-learning enterprise—faculty, students, and community partners. Such studies as that of Schaffer's et al. (2003) that document perspectival differences among faculty members, students, and community partners on ethical problems encountered in

service-learning demonstrate the intertwined relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners and point up how essential it is for those relationships to run smoothly for the maximum quality of service-learning. Based on the above studies, as well as on our experience as practitioners of service-learning, we noted the usefulness of developing a language for understanding these relationships on a conceptual level. Thus, we posed the single research question: What are the primary dimensions of the relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners in service-learning?

Methods

In order to answer this question, we conducted a qualitative case study of our institution's service-learning enterprise by interviewing 12 students, nine faculty members, and eight representatives of community partners, all of whom were involved in service-learning classes during calendar year 2004.

Of the 12 students in the study, 11 were Caucasian and one was African-American. Eleven were female and one was male. Ten were between 20 and 22 years of age, while one was 28 and another was 38. Their majors were social work, political science, speech pathology (2), nutrition, international studies, biology (2), ecology, elementary education, sociology, and recreation. The faculty members were those available and willing to participate, as were the community partners.

Students invited to participate were chosen randomly from all students participating in service-learning courses using a table of random numbers. Interviews of students were conducted during 2005-2006; interviews of faculty members were conducted during 2005-2007; and interviews of community partners were conducted 2006-2008. The student data are the focus of this study. Typically, students are the conduit for communication between instructors and community partners and are therefore in a unique and pivotal position to observe the roles of both instructors and community partners.

Instrument Development

Based on research in the service-learning community, of which the review above is indicative, we then constructed a questionnaire to address the research question: What are the primary dimensions of the relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners in service-learning? Questions focused on the three following areas:

1. Expectations of and for service-learning students, i.e. how do students, agencies, and instructors define the role of the student? Will students fit into a preexisting role within the agency, or will they establish their own role based on interests or course objectives?

2. Preparation of students for service-learning, i.e., what do agencies do to prepare students for service-learning? How effective is it? What do instructors do to prepare students for service-learning? How effective is it?

3. Management of students, i.e., will students be supervised and monitored by the community partner or is the instructor expected to provide oversight? How effective is the oversight that is rendered?

Separate versions of the questionnaire were created for the three service-learning constituencies interviewed (faculty members, students, and community partners). Versions differed only in language to make them appropriate to the particular group. Members of all three constituent groups were interviewed, each with the appropriate version of the questionnaire. The Appendix contains a copy of the interview schedule for student-participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving IRB approval for the research, tape recorded interviews were conducted by the authors and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Trained and monitored by the authors, our research assistant conducted a thematic analysis of the transcripts. Using the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; see also Owen, 1984, and Pitts et al., 2009), the research assistant read approximately one-third of the transcripts multiple times, noting recurring themes and revising them as

warranted by subsequent readings. The second stage of data reduction involved creating a brief summary of participants' answers to each question. This step was useful in consolidating the choice of themes noted in the interviews. Thus, an initial array of themes was established. At this point, we conferred with our research assistant multiple times, discussed and reached consensus on anomalies and ambiguities, and jointly established a final framework of themes. He then employed these themes to code the remaining transcripts.

Results

The analysis described above was designed to address the research question: What are the primary dimensions of the relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners in service-learning? The analysis resulted in these four themes:

1. Control: degree to which the faculty, student or agency set the parameters for the service- learning project

2. Involvement: degree of participation in class-based or site-based activities

3. Preparation: degree of training provided to students to effectively carry out the project; degree of collaboration between faculty and agency prior to the course

4. Oversight: degree of guidance or monitoring provided to the student during the project

The results suggest that the student-participants saw the relationships among instructors, themselves, and community partners in terms of Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight.

Discussion

Regarding the research question–what are the primary dimensions of the relationships among faculty members, students, and community partners in service-learning?–our student-participants suggested that their relationships with faculty members and community partners functioned in terms of Control, Involvement,

Preparation, and Oversight. On this basis, we are suggesting that these results are not peculiar to this group of service-learning students and their instructors and community partners, "suggesting" in the sense that we are inviting others to explore these results and assess their usefulness. However, at this point, we believe that practitioners' own experience of service-learning, as well as their reading of the literature, will confirm these findings and support the claim that, when the three major players in the service-learning enterprise talk about how they relate to each other, their concerns revolve around the four basic relational dimensions of Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight.

In addition, a recent study by Stoecker and Tryon (2009) substantially supports these findings. The goal of their project was to "find out what community organizations really thought about service-learning" (p. 11). Their research team interviewed 67 staff members representing 64 organizations in the Madison, Wisconsin, area. Seven themes emerged from the interviews, and they comprised the concerns, the key issues, those community partners entertained about service-learning. The seven themes that emerged from Stoecker and Tryon's (2009, p. 14) research were

1. Goals and motivations of community organizations for service-learning
2. Finding and selecting service learners
3. Structuring service-learning
4. Managing service learners and service-learning projects
5. Diversity and service-learning
6. Relationships and communication with the higher education institution
7. Indicators of success

Their study duplicated three of the four themes (or relational dimensions) that emerged in the present study: 2. Finding and selecting service learners–Preparation; 3. Structuring service-learning–Control; and 4. Managing service learners and service-learning projects–Oversight.

It is reasonable that Involvement was not included in their findings since that is a dimension more likely to be noticed by students in the service sites than by agency

representatives who are often in administrative positions or even off-site. Stoecker and Tryon's (2009) project advanced the agency perspective, and it was shown to duplicate three of the four themes advancing the student perspective in the present study. We contend that such findings add credibility to the present findings and bolster the view that the discourse of service-learning, when it is about the relationships among the three primary actors, is shaped by issues of Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight.

Moreover, a study by McLean and Behringer (2008) helps further contextualize the present study. Drawing on the work of King et al. (2004), the researchers enumerated nine best practices for managing K-12-university partnerships. Six of the best practices are explicitly about relationships, but the focus of the study is on institutional relationships (partnerships), instead of one-on-one relationships. Examples include "flow of information…needs to become bidirectional," "full participation by both partners…is crucial," and "the relationship must be strong to deal with…unintended consequences." (p. 69). While these are certainly appropriate practices for successful partnerships at any level, McLean and Behringer (2008) focused on the institutional level, whereas the present study focused on the level of the individual instructor who is using a service-learning model in a course. Both studies affirm the centrality of nurturing good working relationships. They differ only in the level of their focus.

Three additional points of discussion seem to be in order. First, we will present a sample of student responses to demonstrate the usefulness of the language of the four relational dimensions. We are advancing this language as one means of bridging the gaps among the "discourse communities" (Bacon, 2002) of students, faculty, and community partners. Second, we will demonstrate the usefulness of one aspect of Turner's (1990) role theory to better understand the roles of classroom instructors and community partners in preparing students for service-learning, specifically the concepts of role boundaries and role boundary expansion. Third, we will reflect on our findings by suggesting directions for future research and applications useful for instructional practice.

Relational Dimensions in Practice

In this section we demonstrate the discourse of service-learning that we are advancing. Note the ease with which our student-participants were able to use the relational dimensions to discuss their service-learning experience.

Control. Students reported a wide range of control they were given over their roles at their service sites. For example, Danielle worked as a hospice visitor but had the freedom to define what she did with the client. She noted that "[the agency] gave you pretty much open rein on when you can go visit, for how long you can visit, and, you know…what you were able to do for them." Gena's service-learning experience was with a Girl Scout event. In this case the faculty member laid out the parameters of the day-long event: "She told us what [our roles] would be," but then, "we planned a whole day of activities… we decided what the event was going to be, and they told us how many people to plan for, but everything else we did on our own."

Involvement. Student involvement in their work varied widely, too. Lucy, working at a school for language disorders, enjoyed heavy involvement in designing her service-learning experience. "The teacher saw that I could do more than others…that I could enjoy working with the kids…and so I kind of took a bigger role than [the others]." Quite the opposite occurred with Hillary, working at a Headstart Center. "All I really remember…was…sitting there and watching the kids…. I had to do reports on it that the teacher [assigned]."

Preparation. Preparation and Oversight belong mainly to community partners and faculty members. One of the students who stated that she enjoyed a high level of control over her service-learning role, Solitah, indicated that she appreciated that the agency let her "explore" and gave her the "freedom" to do what she wanted at the site, but at the same time she wished the agency had provided more structure or guidelines. The agency did not seem to have a good understanding of why she was there. She surmised that if her classroom instructor and the instructor at the site had had more contact, they would have "been able to discuss…what we were doing, and have some things set up for us in particular with the teachers." By contrast Becky, working with disabled children, was very satisfied

with the agency preparation she received: "[the site teacher] would tell us about…an activity that would be coming up that we would be able to participate in…. She would give us information on the activity…. And she'd [tell]…us a little bit about each child with each disorder that we were working with."

Oversight. Most of the instructor oversight was through tracking hours and requiring written reports or papers. Isabell expressed disappointment that her instructor hardly ever visited the service site. "No one followed through…I wonder if they had written goals to accomplish…. It was like our instructors were scared to come see what was going on…we could've told them anything we wanted to tell them." Leanne, however, was very satisfied with the oversight provided by the agency. Working in a pre-student teaching capacity in an elementary school, she reported, "I was able to see, you know, what areas I needed to improve…. [After] delivering a lesson, I realized that I needed some improvement…and…the teacher told me what I needed to do to improve."

The ease with which the student-participants responded to the interview protocol and the richness of their observations suggest that those relational dimensions of Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight were providing the beginnings of a language of service-learning.

Student Views of Faculty and Community Partner Roles

If we are anywhere near the mark that those four relational dimensions provide a language of service-learning, the next reasonable question to pursue would be: "How can that language help bridge the disconnect between those 'discourse communities' of students, instructors, and agencies?"

In order to explore that question we will focus on one of those relational dimensions, Preparation. It is an appropriate test case because Preparation involves all three of the principal actors in service-learning. Students are the ones prepared (or not), and both faculty and agencies may (and often do) prepare students for service-learning.

But first, we turn briefly to Turner's (1990) role theory. In light of their segregation into different "discourse communities" (Bacon,

2002), we contend that effective service-learning requires that the participants experience both a quantitative and a qualitative change in their conventional roles as faculty members, students, and community partners. Drawing on Turner's (1990) discussion of role change, we propose a framework for understanding the complex but critical relationships among students, faculty members, and community partners.

To collaborate in service-learning partnerships, the roles of the instructor, student, and community partner must change quantitatively. That is, the number of duties and rights associated with each role must increase. This increase results in the expansion of boundaries for each role. For example, under a service-learning regime, the faculty members and community partners are now responsible for working together to assure students' experiences at the service sites complement the courses' learning goals, and students are responsible for taking initiatives in both the classroom and at the service site as learners and as workers.

Thus, a unique aspect of service-learning is that boundary expansion for one role (e.g. faculty member) does not necessarily result in a boundary contraction for the alter roles (student and community partner).

Instead, the necessarily collaborative relationships among the three players in service-learning result in overlapping role boundaries where each role in the system at times takes on behaviors that might normally be reserved for other roles. Indeed, we posit that the more complete this overlap of roles, the more successful the service-learning partnership will be, and the more likely that each partner will benefit in reciprocal and equal ways (Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy, 1999). Expanding role boundaries is a way to bridge the disconnect among the separate discourse communities of student, faculty, and community partner. Facilitating that role boundary expansion is a common language of Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight.

The following representative sampling of student responses focuses on Preparation. Students describe and assess the preparation provided by both their classroom instructors and agency representatives. Preparation is a window into faculty and agency roles, a window through

which to observe role boundaries in various stages of expansion and contraction, as well as their effects on service-learning.

Lucy was dissatisfied with her instructor's preparation for entering the service site, a language disorders school, "because I didn't know exactly…what I would be doing [at the site] until I walked in." Her instructor gave the requirements for the assignment and a list of service sites to choose from but no indication of what she would be doing at the various sites. "So I just picked the [Language] School because it was on campus." The site teacher, however, filled that gap: "She pushed me and kind of showed me that I could really do what I had to do." She took extra time with Lucy and told her what she was doing wrong and what would work better. Lucy was very satisfied with the preparation for service-learning she received at the service site. [instructor: expected; agency: expanded.][1]

In Danielle's case, her instructor laid out the students' roles for the day-long Girl Scout event. "She gave us the information we needed as far as how many people to prepare for…and any questions we had, [and] she was very available to help us do whatever we needed." The agency was equally helpful. Their personnel told the students how many people to expect, what they needed to provide, the time frame, and the activities to plan. Consequently, Danielle was very satisfied with the preparation she received for service-learning by both her instructor and the agency representatives. [instructor: expanded; agency: expanded]

Gena was very satisfied with both her instructor's and the community partner's preparation for work as a hospice visitor. The instructor had several hospice supervisors come to her class and give a "thorough explanation of pretty much exactly what you're going to be going through, what to expect and how to get through it." The orientation included a discussion of the kind of relationships the students would have with the clients, what they should do in case of an emergency, and how to access counseling services should they be needed. She added, regarding the community partner specifically, that they brought with them to the classroom

orientation all the paperwork needed to begin work and informed them of the free TB tests required to work there.

[instructor: expanded; agency: expanded]

For Hillary, at a Headstart Center, the instructor supplied students with "a huge packet that explained everything and that was basically it." She was moderately satisfied with this kind of instructor preparation in part because, "it was easy to follow and understand." However, she wished the time on site had been longer than the required three hours (the basis of a written report): "I think there should've been more time spent because three hours, I mean I don't remember anything. I just went there and got nothing from it." As for agency preparation, Hillary reported they did nothing. She explained: "the kids were, you know, less fortunate kids; [it] was a free place for them to go and eat, and … the teachers seemed not to care or that we were there." She reflected, "I wish we would've gotten to do more with the kids."

[instructor: expected; agency: 0]

Isabell's service-learning site was an after-school program run by a local Methodist church. She answered "indifferent" to the question about instructor preparation for the service-learning experience because, as she added, "There was nothing to be satisfied or dissatisfied with…. I mean there wasn't really much of anything." The agency preparation was quite different, however. It provided a civics program for the service-learning students to teach and gave an orientation to its content as well as a description of the physical arrangement of the site and the educational achievement of the students they would be working with.

[instructor: 0; agency: expected]

Another student was also at a Headstart Center. Isabell was very satisfied with her instructor's preparation for the service-learning experience. "She told us about the school, about the students, what she wanted us to have overall when we came out of…the project itself…she basically just set up the guidelines for it, what she wanted us to know, how we could go about it, and then after it was over what we…learned there." However, the agency was another story. Isabell was indifferent toward her agency preparation, "because there wasn't anything necessarily set up for us to do each day." She wished for "a little

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[1] The inserted descriptors indicate students' perceptions of the role played by their instructor and the agency in preparing them for service-learning. 0 = no role reported; expected role = conventional role, within expected boundaries; expanded role = practices that go beyond conventional boundaries.

more structure as far as when we came in, maybe this is what we're going to have y'all do today. And it wasn't like that because of communication," meaning, the classroom instructor needed to talk with the site instructors about plans for her students.[instructor: expected; agency: 0]

Latrice worked in a combination soup kitchen and thrift store, and she was moderately satisfied with her instructor's preparation for the experience. "She provided us a list of places that we could choose and she explained what we would be doing…at each place, and so kind of getting an idea of the duties that I would be performing at [the agency] helped prepare me for what I was going to experience." At the site, however, things did not go so well. She was moderately dissatisfied with the preparation there for lack of organization. Not knowing who is to do what, being told, along with 15 or 20 other volunteers, to help prepare meals can be frustrating, she reflected. "You don't know who is in charge, so maybe having a little bit more order and breaking it down more like, you're going to put the potatoes on the tray, you're going to pour the drinks–breaking it down into smaller steps would've been easier."

[instructor: expected; agency: 0]

Becky was very satisfied with the preparation she received for working with autistic children. She said that in her class they had had lessons about, "interaction with the kids and [that she had] attend[ed] the support group [for parents of autistic children]." She added, "Once I was out and was getting to experience that, I felt like I was learning what had already been taught to me in class. I was getting hands-on experience." The agency's work was much more specific. Her site supervisor, she said, "was able to work with me in all my classes and she was able to set up a schedule for me that would be cooperative with my school schedule." As indicated above, she also briefed Becky thoroughly on upcoming activities with the children and on the children she would be working with. [instructor: expected; agency: expected]

In Cheryl's case, she was on her own regarding preparation for service-learning at a school for language disorders. As she put it, "she [the instructor] didn't really prepare us much, she just told us…we had to do twenty hours…and just to come to her and get it approved." Cheryl

was moderately satisfied with her instructor preparation. "I guess…it kind of pushes you to go find your own brain, you know what I mean." But she did wish for more information on each agency to help her make a good choice. The agency was no different. Regarding the on-site teacher, "she didn't explain…why [the children] were there, so I didn't understand…where their troubles lie…so I…didn't know really how to help them or just to communicate with them." [instructor: 0; agency: 0]

Emma's experience at a counseling center was very different. Her preparation for service-learning was a part of her curriculum. In class, several panels of community partners discussed their agencies and the services they provided the community. She was very satisfied with her preparation by her classroom instructor. However, at the site, she was indifferent about the agency's preparation for service-learning. Lack of time was the main problem. Emma wanted more time with the site supervisor to discuss her service. "What little time that we did have, she gave me a real thorough [briefing], I guess as thorough as she could in four to five minutes, about he kids." In addition, there were counselors and teachers at the site…, and Emma would have liked to get their perspectives on the young clients also. [instructor: expanded; agency: expected]

Rob chose to do his service-learning project at a Habitat for Humanity site. He was very satisfied with the way his instructor prepared him for the work. She invited a representative from the University's service-learning office to the class, and he introduced them to several possible service sites to choose from. Regarding Habitat, Rob reported, "[my instructor] did a good job of telling us exactly what…to expect" and what to bring. ("Make sure you bring your own bottled water and just shorts and a T-shirt.") At the site, there were several houses going up, so there were many jobs available to pick from. "It wasn't forced, like you have to go and get on this roof…you had a little bit of an option of what you wanted to do." Rob was moderately satisfied with the preparation at the site, wishing only for a list of jobs at the beginning of the day, so he didn't have to wait around for the foreman to give the next assignment after he completed his first job. [instructor: expected; agency: expected]

Leanne had an indifferent assessment of her

preparation for pre-student teaching classroom observation. "[My instructor] told us what she expected of us, that she wanted us to observe the teacher and some of the methods of teaching math … that's basically, I think, just about all she did." On further reflection, she recalled her instructor providing "hands-on instruction to sort of get us ready to instruct students. We did a lot of hands-on activities." Thus armed, she was on her own at the school service site, which accounted for her indifferent assessment of preparation there. When asked what the school did to prepare her for the service-learning experience, she replied, "Nothing." Elaborating, she reported: "There was a lack of communication between me, as the student, and the [on-site] teacher … . I think there should be more communication between the student and the teacher before we go into the classroom, so we're more like on …the same sheet of music." [instructor: expected; agency: 0]

As the boundaries among instructor, student, and community partner expand and overlap, so do the meanings attached to each role. Given sufficient quantitative role change in the form of role boundary expansion and overlapping roles, quantitative change evolves into qualitative role change. The student experiences presented above provide a glimpse into various stages of instructor and agency role expansion and contraction. Ideally, over time faculty members and community partners collaborate to prepare students for a quality learning experience and provide substantive assistance to the community. Beyond preparation, over time the faculty member ideally is no longer the only educator in the service-learning process, and the student is no longer the only learner. Community partners become instructors when they prepare students for work at their site, and faculty members become learners as they become involved on the ground along with their students. The triad of roles expands and evolves into a system of reciprocal educators and learners collaborating on the common vision of the project.

Applications to Teaching and Research

The primary findings of our study are the four relational dimensions of service-learning: Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight. These four dimensions are the major themes we found in the student-participant responses.

On the basis of our findings, we offer these suggestions for practitioners:

Instructors. We have three recommendations for instructors. (1) Use the terms as you talk with community partners and students about your collaboration at a service-learning site. Make them a normal part of your vocabulary as you sort out relationships among yourselves, students, and community partners. Make them your home base when you address challenges at your service sites. Test them for their utility. (2) Use the four relational dimensions as a rubric when you develop a memorandum of understanding among yourself, your students, and your community partners. So in addition to talking about and with these key terms, institutionalize them in your documents. (3) Consider the four key terms to be a unit, omitting none of them in their use. Oversight is follow up to Preparation. One without the other is dysfunctional. Omitting Control only raises questions and causes frustration over who is in charge. Involvement is instructors' opportunity to model the habits of service and learning we want our students to acquire. Treat the four relational dimensions of service-learning as a symbiotic whole.

Picking Each Other Up. This term is common in sports. If I fail, I ask my teammate to "pick me up." Our study reminds us that lack of preparation on the part of either instructor or agency can be compensated for by the other, as in the cases of Emma and Lucy. An instructor alone can arm his or her students with enough information and guidelines that they can succeed. It's always preferable that both partners do their job well, but an alert and caring agency representative can notice a student who seems lost and step in to provide much of the orienting information omitted by an instructor, and vice versa. When that occurs, it is often a case of expanding role boundaries. Rather than saying, "That's not my job," the alert instructor or community partner will step beyond his or her conventional role boundary to assure quality service-learning.

And we offer these suggestions for researchers:

Our study underscored the usefulness of Turner's (1990) concepts of role boundaries

and role boundary expansion. The roles of community partners and faculty members were clearly depicted in their reported preparation of students for service-learning. Several observations seem to follow from those findings. The case showed the range of possible roles community partners and faculty members may perform, from no role (Hillary, agency; Isabell, instructor) to the normally expected role within the parameters "instructor" and "agency" (Latrice, instructor; Becky, agency) to expanded roles on the part of both faculty members and community partners (Emma, instructor; Lucy, agency). Student reports were very clear that some instructors and agencies collaborated on preparation of students for service-learning; that some community partners simply stayed on-site and did the minimum to get the work out of the students and some faculty members stayed in the classroom and did the minimum required to get the assignment done; and that some did nothing toward preparing students for service-learning. Students faced with no preparation from either instructor or agency noticed and responded negatively, as you would expect. We can reasonably surmise that the quality of both learning and service was diminished as a result. Therefore, a direction for future research would be to raise the question: *What needs to happen for a community partner to become a full partner in preparing students for service-learning?* The same goes for instructors: *What needs to happen for them to expand their role boundaries beyond their habitual ones?*

Future Research. It is important that future research develop a role expansion metric. Such an instrument would be useful for assessing the effectiveness of training faculty members and community partners to development expanded service-learning roles.

But of course there are certain inherent limitations to these findings that would serve to moderate their whole-hearted adoption. First, only twelve students were interviewed. A different set of student-participants with different majors or with more diversity of age and ethnicity may have yielded different results. Second, student-participants were interviewed one to two years after they had taken the courses in question, so accuracy of recall may have been an issue. Third, the service-learning program in 2004 at our university had been underway in earnest only four years. A more mature program examined in this same manner may have yielded different results. In any case, each of these limitations is also a challenge to researchers to pursue the questions they raise.

There remain now some more general reflections on the students' reports that are based on ancillary information gleaned from students' elaborations of their initial answers. First, these service-learning students wanted structure in the form of guidance and advice about the service site and about the people they would be serving. Second, they wanted to know what to expect at the service site, what exactly they would be doing, and who they would be working with. Third, they wanted to engage with the site. They didn't want just to go to a site and rack up hours. However, ancillary or not, all these concerns can be addressed with a robust collaboration among faculty, students, and community partners to prepare students for useful hands-on learning and community service.

In closing, here are some specific examples of course design and management that are consistent with the study's results and easily implemented by instructors. First, instructors can invite agency personnel to class to explain what the agency provides the community and what students can do to help them provide that service. Second, instructors can provide students with detailed directions to the service site and safety tips if they are in order. Third, instructors can explain service-learning and how community service may be used by students to achieve the learning objectives of the class. Fourth, instructors can lead their students in role-playing situations they may encounter at the site, e.g., mediating between two fourth graders who want to use the same computer; or talking with a nursing home resident who seems uncommunicative. Finally, instructors can give specific instructions for writing a reflection paper along with examples and practice (e.g., have students do several days of journaling, then do a practice reflection paper following the instructions you provide).

Similarly, what can community partners do to prepare students for service-learning? First, the community partner can offer to attend the class to talk about their agency, what it does in the community and who it serves (bring a brochure

that includes directions to the site and contact information). Second, the community partner can provide an on-site orientation session for new service-learning students. Third, a part of that orientation can include the agency staff as well as representatives of the agency's clients. Fourth, the agency can provide students with several options as to what they would be doing at the site. Fifth, the agency can create "slots," preset jobs into which students can easily fit (e.g., at an after school program, working with outdoor activities, doing homework with the students or creating art projects). As shown by our results, students notice and respond to the quality of preparation they receive and express clearly their ideas about what that preparation should include.

All of these conclusions, suggestions and implications address, in various ways, the inherent disconnect that exists among instructors, students, and community partners, whose separate "discourse communities" Bacon (2002) often isolate them from each other. Stanton (2000) has recommended, in very general terms, a solution. Practitioners need to become more research-oriented, and researchers need to become more practice-oriented. In the case of the former, that would entail more informed self-awareness on the part of practitioners; and in the latter, that would entail researchers listening to and collaborating with those who are working "in the trenches." We quite agree. Each seeing the world somewhat as the other sees it puts them more nearly on the same page and makes further collaboration possible. For each, practitioner and researcher, that amounts to an expansion of role boundaries.

We believe that the basic relational dimensions of service-learning, Control, Involvement, Preparation, and Oversight, that emerged from this study provide a robust vehicle for dialogue among faculty members, students, and community partners as they collaborate in service-learning. When their role boundaries expand to share in the enactment of those relational dimensions, true collaboration is in sight and service-learning quality increases.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule for Students
(questions varied slightly for instructors and community partners)

Think of a recent course you took that used service-learning. Use that experience to respond to these questions.

1.   Prior to beginning your service, what did you expect your role(s) in the agency would be?
1a.   Was your role set for you by the agency, or did you create your own role?

2.   During your service, what role(s) did you actually perform?
2a.   Were these role(s) set for you by the agency, or did they create their own role(s)?
2b.   How satisfied were you with these roles?
        Very Satisfied Moderately Satisfied Indifferent Moderately Dissatisfied
        Very Dissatisfied
2c.   What worked?
2d.   What didn't work?
2e.   What more was needed for you to perform your role(s)?

3.   What did your instructor do to prepare you for the role(s) you actually performed?
3a.   How satisfied were you with this preparation?
        Very Satisfied Moderately Satisfied Indifferent Moderately Dissatisfied
        Very Dissatisfied
3b.   What was good about this preparation?
3c.   What about this preparation didn't work or was not useful?
3d.   What more was needed for the preparation to be useful?

4.   What did the agency do to prepare you for the role(s) you actually performed?
4a.   How satisfied were you with this preparation?
        Very SatisfiedModerately Satisfied Indifferent Moderately Dissatisfied
        Very Dissatisfied
4b.   What was good about this preparation?
4c.   What about this preparation didn't work or was not useful?
4d.   What more was needed for the preparation to be useful?

5.   Who oversaw your work as you performed your roles?
        Agency Instructor Both
5a. How satisfied were you with this oversight?
        Very Satisfied Moderately Satisfied Indifferent Moderately Dissatisfied
        Very Dissatisfied
5b. What was good about this oversight?
5c. What about this oversight didn't work or was not useful?
5d. What more was needed for this oversight to be useful?