



## Community Food Security Hub

### **Literature Review on Community Service Learning and course-based Community Based Research in relation to the “food movement”.**

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#### **Key Terms and Background**

The Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning defines **community service learning** (CSL) as an “educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities.” To ensure that CSL is not merely an add-on component of a course, Bringle and Hatcher (1996) argue that reflection is a key component of CSL to allow students to “reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (222). The principles underlying CSL are equality, experiential learning, and community engagement. CSL can be done as an individual or group project and under the supervision of a faculty member and/or the community organization (Andree 2007). Service-learning activities are intended to reinforce classroom content while also providing a beneficial service to the community (McCarthy & Tucker 1999; Bringle & Hatcher 1996; Chupp & Joseph 2010).

Strand et al. (2000) define **community-based research** (CBR) as, “a partnership of students, faculty, and community members who collaboratively engage in research with the purpose of solving pressing community problems or effecting social change” (3). In traditional CSL, it can be difficult to make a connection between the skills the community organization needs and the substantive material that students need to learn in a course (Stoecker 2008). Existing literature suggests that CBR solves this disconnect by drawing directly on the research skills students are learning to address research questions defined by the community partner (Strand et al. 2003).

Since the 1980s, CBR and CSL have become an increasingly important part of post-secondary institutions mandates and curriculum. There are several concerns driving the support for campus-community partnerships, including (Ostrander 2004; Strand et al. 2003; Dulmus & Cristalli 2012):

- Grounding academic research in real-world context
- Connecting knowledge and practice
- Forming and strengthening relationships between academics and community members
- Improving conditions in local communities/supporting local initiatives
- Building democracy and civil society



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The main components of university civic engagement are student learning, curriculum transformation, community-defined priorities, and knowledge production (Ostrander 2004). It should be noted that these components are emphasized differently based on the context of each partnership.

### **Benefits and Impacts**

There is extensive literature on the benefits of integrating these partnerships into post-secondary curriculum. Several articles on the topic suggest that these partnerships can (Kendrick 1996; Strand et al. 2003; Tucker & McCarthy, 1998; Kozeracki, 2001; Chopyak & Levesque 2002):

- Serve to enhance problem-solving skills
- Build student skill levels
- Develop leadership capacity
- Build and strengthen connections between the university and community
- Provide the opportunity for career exploration

There is existing literature which states that due to increasing financial constraints, community organizations are unable to pay for certain services and these partnerships can provide them with services for free, which helps them to be more effective and efficient (Chupp & Joseph 2010; Andree 2007). There have, however, been critiques raised regarding a lack of critical attention in existing literature to the motivations and impacts of these partnerships from the community perspective (Strand et al. 2003; Kelly and Wolf-Wendel 2000). The literature on the effects of these partnerships focus primarily on the benefits for students and treat the community as solely a beneficiary of the service rather than as a partner in identifying the problems and solutions (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2000). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) argue that this is rooted in service learning as a way for higher education to do *for* the community rather than as a way to do *with* the community. Ward and Wolf-Wendel, therefore, argue that it is important to move towards research *with* the community and offer four recommendations to build these partnerships:

- Connect through commonalities – Ensure that students have a connection to the people they are doing work with
- Blur the boundaries between campus and community – Create greater fluidity between campus and community participants
- Consider the history, position, and power of all participants in the partnership – Make all participants cognizant of their power and position in society within the partnership



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- Encourage reciprocal assessment – Conduct formative and summative assessments of the partnership from both the campus and community perspectives

#### *For the Food Movement*

There is very little literature specifically on the development and impacts of campus-community partnerships for the food movement; however, the articles that are available suggest that these partnerships have several of the benefits that have been outlined in the general literature on CBR and CSL.

Nelson et al. (2005) identify several ways that the community-academic partnerships on food security in Thunder Bay and surrounding communities have been beneficial for this movement, including:

- Building and solidifying several networks
- Developing greater trust and commitment between the participants
- Leading to greater awareness of food insecurity issues in the community
- Enhancing food security in this area

Andree (2007) discusses the impacts of his course “The Canadian food system: a community development approach” at Trent University, which was an experiment in community-based education (CBE) that incorporated partnerships among third and fourth year students and local organizations working on food issues, such as farmers markets, community gardens, and food banks. Based on his experiences, feedback from the community organizations, and course evaluations, Andree identified several benefits of these partnerships:

- Benefits for students:
  - Build technical research skills
  - Gain a sense of contributing to social change
  - Interpersonal, negotiation, and presentation skills
- Community Outcomes:
  - Provided new avenues in terms of funding and organizational models
  - Students brought new perspectives and insights to the projects
  - Students conducted useful interviews
  - Gain a sense of contributing to student formation

### **Barriers and Challenges**



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A functional and effective partnership must address several existing barriers and challenges. Issues can arise around institutional and structural barriers lack of trust, establishing research priorities and defining the research question, the allocation of funding, and what constitutes valuable knowledge and outcomes.

### *Reproducing Whiteness*

It is evident in the analysis of the underlying assumptions of service-learning that these projects can serve to reproduce rather than challenge the functional properties of “whiteness”. Whiteness is both a descriptive physical and social characteristic and a position in society in terms of a person’s relationship with a culturally and materially privileged race (Rose and Paisley 2012, 140). Leonardo (2002) defines whiteness as “a collection of everyday strategies characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions” (32). Rather than understanding whiteness as a “passive description of racial domination without agents,” Leonardo’s definition identifies whiteness as part of a “process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color” (Mitchell et al. 2012, 613).

How might CSL reproduce Whiteness? Instead of being seen as a form of learning and an act of social change, service in CSL is often presented to and/or perceived by students as “charity” or “volunteer work” (Endres & Gould 2009, 422). This missionary approach can lead students to think that the goal of the service is to make “them” more like “us” (Mitchell et al. 2012, 616). Furthermore, framing the service as charity or volunteer work creates a hierarchy between the students and the communities that are presented as needing the service (Endres & Gould 2009; Green 2003).

As Endres and Gould (2009) experienced while using a service-learning project in an undergraduate Communications course, many students saw their whiteness as beneficial in their ability to help others (429). This approach to service reinforces whiteness as a “social location of structural advantage” (Owen 2007, 206). It is evident that treating these service projects as charity “advantages the giver, humbles the receiver, avoids core causes for inequality, and skirts questions of fundamental reform” (Hoops 2011, 4).

### *Institutional and Structural Barriers*

Literature on community-based research and campus-community partnerships does address the institutional barriers that exist in developing truly equitable partnerships with universities and community organizations as each is organized and structured differently. Barriers can revolve around who sets the schedule, who gets the funding, control over the product, and who gets the funding (Stoecker 2008; Dempsey 2010).



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Questions have also been raised regarding who determines the labour pool. In particular, critiques are raised on the greater emphasis placed on the education of students rather than the needs of the community organization. In many partnerships, community organizations have felt that their role was understood as educating the students and that their needs were not met in return (Sandy & Holland 2006; Stoecker 2008).

### *Issues of Trust*

Barriers related to a lack of trust and respect between partners is also a prominent topic in existing literature (Dulmus & Cristalli 2012). Sullivan et al. (2001) identify several trust issues that can emerge in partnerships, including: a historical lack of trust between communities and academic institutions, awareness of past mistreatment of the communities in research, and the feeling that researchers are being dishonest about their research agenda.

Building trust in these partnerships can be a long process. For Sullivan et al. (2001), the development of trust was facilitated through researchers being honest about their agendas, following through on promises, and implementing research promises.

Partnerships with a lack of meaningful input from the community partners can create ownership tensions and skewed priorities (Peyton 2010).

### *Establishing Research Priorities and Control of the Results*

As many partnerships are designed to meet students' educational needs or faculty publication needs, community organizations often feel that they must fit their needs into a predesigned package (Stoecker 2008; Sullivan et al. 2001). Stoecker (2008) argues that this can greatly affect the control community organizations have over the research priorities and the results. There are several ways to maximize community control over the research, including:

- A participatory design process
  - Process of listing research goals, the strategies to achieve these goals, and evaluation methods
- Distribute a proposed research design to community partners for feedback and approval
- Provide the opportunity for community review at the initial draft stage

### **Recommendations for Building Partnerships**

Andree (2007) does note that some of the partnerships in his course at Trent were less successful and argues that clear expectations and strong communication are important for the success of these projects. Therefore, he suggests the use of a research placement



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agreement between the students, instructor, and community organization, which would outline the following:

- The research question and goals
- Responsibilities of the participants
- Communication protocol
- Clear plan for the presentation of the results

Based on the Contextual Model of practice (Nelson and McPherson 2004), Nelson et al. (2005) offer a number of recommendations for building community-academic research partnership based:

- Both formal and informal interactions within the partnership should occur within a dynamic and changing web of networks that has no established centre, but is rather rooted in context
- The vision of the project should remain at the core of the partnership
- An emphasis should be placed on community-capacity building, which can be done through building shared values, listening to all community voices throughout the process, using a diversity of resources, including the unique gifts of the individuals and groups involved, and focusing on the process rather than definitive plans

These recommendations are similar to those proposed by Ward and Wolf-Wendel discussed earlier. Findings by Ostrander (2005) also emphasize the importance of flow and process, arguing that a dynamic and developmental framework of these partnerships is more useful than one based on grounded in models and best practices.

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