Introduction to IJRSLCE, 7(1): Pursuing Scholarly Inquiry to Inform and Improve Community Engagement Practice in K–12 and Higher Education

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Service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) practitioner–scholars are interested in civic-mindedness and students' self-efficacy, reciprocal partnerships, and community well-being. Increasingly, scholars are paying attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. This issue of the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement* (*IJRSLCE*) contains articles on those topics and related issues. Articles include an exploration of the community engagement experiences of college students with minoritized sexual and gender identities; an analysis of the service-learning experiences of Asian immigrant high school students; an examination of teacher preparation for work with persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and a discussion of how a host community benefits from international service-learning. Taken together, the articles demonstrate systematic inquiry and critical reflection that could inform and improve community engagement practice in K–12 and higher education.

Keywords: civic-mindedness; collective impact; diversity, equity, and inclusion; sense of belonging; service-learning

In the field of service-learning and community engagement (SLCE), research is working hard to catch up with practice. Like SLCE practitioners, researchers have been employing a variety of approaches and methods to address a range of issues pertinent to the field. Among such issues is diversity in relation to equity and inclusion (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012; Bowen & Berrien, in press; Wong[Lau], 2016). As Wong(Lau) has noted, many institutions of higher education aim to prepare students for work and civic participation in a diverse and changing world—a praiseworthy goal in response to such factors as "the imperative for equity" (para. 1). Also in the context of equity and inclusion, attention to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) issues has been increasing (Bergersen, Klar, & Schmitt, 2018; Irazábal & Huerta, 2016; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

SLCE practitioner–scholars have been studying civic-mindedness and exploring students' self-efficacy too. They are generally interested in community well-being and community empowerment. As community engagement is increasingly institutionalized, many practitioner–scholars have been stressing the need for reciprocity in the partnerships between institutions of higher education and community-based agencies.

This issue of the *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement* (*IJRSLCE*) covers at least some of this terrain, with an emphasis on rigorous research and deep reflection. One of the underlying themes of several articles in this issue is diversity, equity, and inclusion. Two articles address "sense of belonging," but in different ways.

In one of this issue's lead articles, Tania D. Mitchell, finn j. schneider, and Krista M. Soria share the findings of a sequential mixed-methods study that explored the community engagement experiences of college students with minoritized sexual and gender identities. Drawing on survey and interview data, the study found significant differences between the rates at which students participated in community service in relation to their gender identity and sexual orientation. The findings should encourage discussion of how identity informs experience and how facilitators of community engagement experiences might interrogate their practices to facilitate the full participation of LGBTQ students.

Siqing "Erica" He's article puts the spotlight on members of a particular immigrant group who typically face social isolation because of perceived deficits in language skills or knowledge of cultural norms. According to He, though their service-learning participation, group members (Asian immigrants in high school) assumed "server roles that showcase[d] their strengths" and "broadened their sense of inclusion and belonging."

An article on special education indicates the "rich intersection of identities" that persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DDs) bring to a social setting. Although the focus of the article is on the experiences of students who completed a service-learning course on I/DDs, the "increased awareness of the world of people with disabilities" speaks to the place and power of service-learning as part of special education that responds to the needs of a population group that tends to be marginalized. Authors Raul Leon, Rhonda Kraai, and Kelli Dowd situate their inquiry in special education teacher preparation, with attention to explicit standards such as the "creation of safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive environments."

This issue also includes an article related to a project that investigated attitudes about racial and ethnic diversity in a rural area. Jeffrey S. Bartel, David C. Droppa, and Geoffrey L. Wood document and share a process evaluation of what was regarded as a successful academic–community research partnership. The authors claim this as the first case study based on a process evaluation with an "outside" facilitator (i.e., a facilitator from outside the university where the study was initiated).

In what follows, we introduce the contents of each section of the Journal: Advances in Theory and Methodology, Community Partnerships and Impacts, Faculty Roles and Institutional Issues, International Service-Learning and Community Engagement Research, and Student Outcomes (Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education). In addition, we take a quick look at the Book Reviews section.

Advances in Theory and Methodology

The Advances in Theory and Methodology section contains two articles. In the first article, Lottie Baker provides an account of an exhaustive search and systematic review of the literature on community-based service-learning (CBSL) in language education. The review is timely, given the "shifting landscape" currently marked by growing interest among students in developing the multilingual communicative competence that 21st-century careers demand. Although the review has revealed positive associations between CBSL and student outcomes in second language education, Baker argues that, to justify the investment of resources in CBSL, researchers should conduct quasi-experimental studies aimed at demonstrating its impact on students and the community alike.

In the second article, Robert G. Bringle, Thomas W. Hahn, and Julie A. Hatcher contribute to advances in theory and methodology by offering additional evidence on the validity of the *civic-minded graduate* (CMG) construct. Civic-mindedness is defined as "a person's inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community" (Steinberg, Hatcher, & Bringle, 2011, p. 20). Bringle and colleagues report two studies that have confirmed predicted conceptual relationships between CMG and components of its nomological network, supporting CMG's validity and its utility as "a superordinate educational objective" for courses and programs with intended civic-learning outcomes. The authors hold up CMG as a means for assessing civic growth at various levels: individual, course, program, department, school, and institution (including inter-institution).

Community Partnerships and Impacts

The purpose of this section of the Journal is not merely to draw attention to partnerships between higher education institutions and their larger communities but also to demonstrate the impacts of such partnerships. In recent times, there has been concern about the lopsidedness of partnership outcomes and impacts, as revealed in research published in this section of *IJRSLCE* over the years. As Bargerstock and Bloomgarden (2016) have noted, the benefits of university–community partnerships are weighted

disproportionately in favor of "insider" constituencies (mainly students and faculty) over external (community) entities. Research on university–community partnerships should be "more definitively informed by critical lenses on reciprocity, sustainability, and mutuality" (Bargerstock & Bloomgarden, para. 5). Put another way, scholars pursuing community-engaged partnerships should pay attention to "questions and challenges of: *sustainability*; *inclusion, democratic practice, and social justice*; *mutuality and reciprocity*; *ethics*; and *alignment and collaboration in design and practice*" (Bloomgarden, 2017, para. 4).

It is in this section that we locate the Bartel, Droppa, and Wood article. In "Improving Academic–Community Partnerships: A Case Study of a Project Investigating Attitudes about Diversity," the authors identify factors that promote partnership success, factors that hinder partnership success, and frameworks for successful partnerships. In the process, they show ways in which their research contributes to knowledge of such partnerships.

"Addressing Complex Public Problems Through Coalition-Based Approaches: Collective Impact and the CEP Competencies" is the second of two articles in this section of the Journal. Co-authors Melanie Brown and Tami L. Moore explore the intersection of university and community approaches to dealing with complex public issues—approaches encompassing coalition-based strategies that include a leading role for community engagement professionals (CEPs). The authors embrace "collective-impact practice" and an anchor-institution philosophy, the latter with its emphasis on stable and sustainable institutions that convene stakeholders, facilitate programs, and lead initiatives designed to improve economic and social conditions in particular geographic areas (Bowen, 2015). Further, the authors argue in favor of "equitable and socially just partnerships" that function with "a commitment to community voice and community authority."

Faculty Roles and Institutional Issues

One of the essential factors for institutionalizing community engagement in higher education is the degree to which faculty members are involved in the implementation process (Furco, Weerts, Burton, & Kent, 2009). With respect to faculty involvement and support, sustained institutionalization is achieved when a substantial number of influential faculty members participate as instructors, supporters, and advocates of community engagement (Furco et al.).

Articles in this section of the Journal sometimes present new conceptual frameworks regarding faculty roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis community-engaged scholarship. Sometimes they present the results of research on faculty motivation for practicing SLCE or the positive and negative effects of these practices on faculty development.

In this issue, a three-member team of engaged scholars/teacher educators sheds light on three U.S. states' policy positions on civic engagement, including service-learning, in K–12 (primary and secondary) education. Analyzing the findings of their multi-case study, Leah Katherine Saal, Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell, and Tynisha D. Meidl note concerns regarding ethics of access for teacher preparation as well as equity in access to service-learning pedagogy and civic engagement curricula in K–12 schools. As Saal and colleagues argue, mandating student participation while failing to provide adequate support for teacher preparation may lead to lack of access to, or less meaningful participation in, service-learning and other civic engagement activities.

International Service-Learning and Community Engagement Research

Conceptualizations of international service-learning (ISL) usually emphasize student learning and student development outcomes over benefits for the community (see Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Chan, Ho-Yin Yau, Tong, Lam, & Kwan, 2018). For example, Bringle and Hatcher (2011) have observed that the "international" settings for ISL "provides new and unique opportunities for learning, especially in ways that contribute to the international education of students" (pp. 18–19). The emphasis on student-focused

outcomes is understandable, considering the pedagogical nature of service-learning and the rootedness of ISL in study abroad and international education (Bringle & Hatcher).

ISL articles published in community engagement journals, including *IJRSLCE*, have reflected the student outcomes emphasis. Prospective *IJRSLCE* authors are told that articles in this section of the Journal "can present the results of studies of student outcomes; faculty motivation, roles, and professional development; institutionalization issues; and community partnerships and impacts in non-U.S. settings" (IJRSLCE, n.d.). There is evidently a dearth of ISL research and related submissions concentrated on outcomes for the community. An ISL research agenda proposed by Tonkin (2011) takes into account the needs of not only students but other stakeholders as well. Still, as Tonkin suggests, the benefits of both research and practice are seen as mainly for students, with relatively little consideration of the benefits for the host community. At the same time, research has shown negative social, cultural, and environmental impacts of ISL and similar programs on vulnerable host communities (see, e.g., Larsen, 2016; Wood, Banks, Galiardi, Koehn, & Schroeder, 2011).

Against that background, a welcome contribution to the literature on ISL is an article by Claudia Chapa-Cortés, which provides a preliminary analysis of how a host community experienced and learned from ISL. As Chapa-Cortés tells us, the goal of her research was to elevate scholarship that critically analyzes the experiences of ISL host communities in order to contribute to a broader discourse on the benefits of ISL. Indeed, such a goal is important, especially because of the potential of ISL to perpetuate colonial perspectives and practices.

Student Outcomes (Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education)

The Student Outcomes section consists of five articles, including Mitchell, schneider, and Soria's. As noted above, Mitchell and colleagues' research drew on data from a survey (as well as interviews). It was one of the first studies to use national survey data to analyze community engagement participation by LGBTQ-identified students. In their exemplary study, the trio of researchers analyzed students' experiences of "marginalization, silencing, and erasure." And in their article, they complement their cogent analysis with suggestions for future, related research.

Beyond what Mitchell, schneider, and Soria have suggested, researchers could examine the extent to which colleges and universities have adopted LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. In particular, they could investigate whether classroom practices integrate LGBTQ-focused lessons that not only reflect inclusivity but also affirm all students' identities—and in a way that students will at least be comfortable with becoming civically engaged.

He's insightful article, titled "Finding Home: Developing a Sense of Belonging Through Service-Learning," is in this section. The author discusses a study that explored how 1.25-generation Asian immigrant high school students negotiated their sense of belonging as they participated in an afterschool service-learning-based program and made sense of their experiences.

In "A Randomized Study of Mindfulness and Service-Learning with Students in Vietnam," Thao N. Le, Nguyen Thi Kinh, and Keo Douang describe mindfulness-based learning as a component of, or complement to, a service-learning approach. The findings of their study, which involved 168 Vietnamese university students, showed support for "an engaged mindfulness approach" (combining training in mindfulness and service-learning) that could shape civic behavior and ultimately improve community well-being.

The two other articles in Student Outcomes are Leon, Kraai, and Dowd's "Preparing Teachers for Special Education: Lessons from a Service-Learning Course" (mentioned earlier) and "Exploring the Differential Effects of Service-Learning on Students' Sense of Belonging: Does Social Class Matter?" by Krista M. Soria, Ashley S. Hufnagle, Isabel Lopez-Hurtado, and Tai Do. In the latter, the authors point to enlightening research results that suggest significant positive effects of service-learning courses on lower/working-class students' sense of belonging.

Book Reviews

An additional section of the Journal contains reviews of three books. Carol Burton's review of *Building Bridges: Community and University Partnerships in East St. Louis* by Kenneth M. Reardon highlights faculty and student immersion in the community. In examining the in-depth case descriptions and analyses, Burton notes how essential student learning opportunities and faculty leadership merge with resident commitment and participation to deal with urban re-development issues.

Thomas A. Dahan reviews *Measures for Community and Neighborhood Research* by Mary L. Ohmer, Claudia Coulton, Darcy A. Freedman, Joanne L. Sobeck, and Jamie Booth. Ten of 13 chapters present specific instruments for measuring community-related factors and phenomena. The primary weakness of that book, Dahan tells us, is the authors' seeming unawareness of the SLCE field and its contributions to community research.

Finally, Cyndy Caravelis assesses *The Cambridge Handbook of Service Learning and Community Engagement* as "comprehensive and thorough." Edited by Corey Dolgon, Tania D. Mitchell, and Timothy K. Eatman, the handbook is said to deliver a depth of material that should stimulate interest even among seasoned service-learning/community engagement practitioners.

Concluding Remarks

Volume 7, Issue 1 of *IJRSLCE* covers various SLCE topics in highly informative articles that adhere to this Journal's rigorous standards. The Journal's Section Editors, and especially the issue's Peer Reviewers (see Appendix), played an essential role in ensuring that the standards have been maintained. Suggestions for future research contained in most of the articles provide opportunities for both accomplished researchers and emerging scholars in the SLCE field. Taken together, the articles demonstrate attention to systematic inquiry and critical reflection that could inform and improve community engagement practice in K–12 and higher education in significant ways.

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Appendix

Peer Reviewers for IJRSLCE, 7(1), 2019

Lottie Baker	The George Washington University
Spencer Clark	Kansas State University
Kathryn Clements	Michigan State University
Jeremy Doughty	University Studies Abroad Consortium
Rebecca Dumlao	East Carolina University
Andrew Furco	University of Minnesota
Elizabeth Ann Glass Geltman	CUNY School of Public Health
Patrick Green	Loyola University Chicago

Nickesia Gordon	Rochester Institute of Technology
Kelly Kelley	Western Carolina University
Brandon Kliewer	Kansas State University
Josh Krawczyk	University of Washington
Morgan Lewing	Texas A&M University–Central Texas
Jessica Mann	Duquesne University
Paul Matthews	University of Georgia
Miles McNall	Michigan State University
Keith Morton	Providence College
Drew Pearl	University of Alabama
David Procter	Kansas State University
Lacey Schauwecker	University of Southern California
Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell	Louisiana State University
Sherri Tapp	Oral Roberts University
Heidi Whitford	Barry University
Elizabeth Williams	UMass Amherst

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