IJRSLCE | International Journal of Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement

Volume 10 | Issue 1 Article 8

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Recommended Citation

Cohen, A., Walker-DeVose, D., & Andrews, U. (2022). The role of power in the experiences of service-learning community partners. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, *10*(1). Article 8. https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.66274

International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement
Volume 10, Issue 1, Article 8 | 2022 | ISSN: 2374-9466 | https://ijrslce.scholasticahq.com/

The Role of Power in the Experiences of Service-Learning Community Partners

Adrienne Cohen, Dina Walker-DeVose, and Urkovia Andrews

While the body of empirical work regarding the experiences of community partners in service-learning is expanding, there is limited understanding of the role of power at both the individual and institutional levels. This article discusses a qualitative study that focused on the experiences of 20 community partners who collaborated with faculty and students on various service-learning projects. Using theories related to power, the authors sought to understand the role of relational and structural power during service-learning from the perspectives of community partners. Findings here indicate that while faculty and universities are perceived to hold power over community partners, this is not always the case. In addition, power has both negative and positive effects in the relationships between both individuals and organizations engaged in service-learning.

Keywords: *service-learning, power, community partners, qualitative research*

El Rol del Poder en las Experiencias de los Socios Comunitarios en el Aprendizaje-Servicio

Adrienne Cohen, Dina Walker-DeVose y Urkovia Andrews

A pesar del reciente auge del trabajo empírico sobre las experiencias de los socios comunitarios en el Aprendizaje-Servicio (A+S), la comprensión del rol del poder a nivel individual e institucional todavía es muy limitada. El presente artículo constituye un estudio cualitativo que se enfoca en las experiencias de veinte socios comunitarios que colaboraron con profesores y estudiantes en varios proyectos A+S. A través de diferentes teorías sobre poder, los autores se acercan al rol del poder relacional y estructural durante el aprendizaje-servicio desde la perspectiva de los socios comunitarios. Las conclusiones del estudio indican que, pese a la percepción dominante de que el profesorado y las universidades ostentan el poder sobre los socios comunitarios, este no siempre es el caso. Asimismo, el poder tiene efectos positivos y negativos sobre las relaciones entre los individuos y las organizaciones involucradas en el aprendizaje-servicio.

Palabras clave: *Aprendizaje-servicio, Poder, Socios comunitarios, Investigación cualitativa*

Editors' Note: Translation by **Maria Fernandez Cifuentes**
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Service-learning (SL) is a pedagogy where students engage in service to the community in order to apply classroom learning to real world environments and to apply their real-world experiences to their academic learning. This pedagogical approach involves three main groups: students, faculty and community partners. The focus of this work is on the roles and experiences of community partners who provided learning environments for SL experiences. The experiences of community partners relative to time, communication, roles, benefits and power are discussed in the literature review. While a rich body of work exists regarding these topics, little is known regarding the role of both relational and institutional power in SL. This is

especially important for community partners. Results in our study add to the canon of existing literature by shedding light on the power dichotomies between faculty, students and community partners in SL.

Literature Review

Time

When considering the experiences of community partners relative to SL, several authors have spoken about challenges related to time (Budhai, 2013; Gerstenblatt, 2014; Jettner, et al., 2017; Kerrigan, et al., 2015; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy, & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinkler, et al., 2014). This has been articulated in multiple ways including: the short-term time commitment on the part of students, different calendars for academia and community partners, the investment of time on the part of community partner staff, and the lack of time required for relationship building between community partners, faculty and students.

Jettner and colleagues (2017) discussed how difficult it was to have any significant impact on a community organization in the 15 weeks of a SL class. Multiple authors found that the most common concern of community partners was students waiting until the last minute or not following deadlines in completing their service thereby limiting the timeframe of service even further than the single semester (Budhai, 2013; Rinaldo, et al., 2015). Sandy and Holland (2006) found that twenty or fewer hours of service reduced the educational effects on students and both short- and long-term effects on community partners.

The misalignment of academic and community partner calendars has also been an issue related to time discussed by multiple authors (Budhai, 2013; Kerrigan, et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Sandy and Holland (2006) discussed how this misalignment, combined with the short-term service, compounds logistical challenges for community partners. Stoecker and colleagues (2009) stated a need for compatibility between academic and organizational calendars so that academic deadlines and community partner priorities could more closely align.

The amount of time required for the integration of a SL component into a service organization has often been underestimated by community partners, faculty and students (Tinkler, et al., 2014). community partners devote a great deal of time to orienting, training, guiding, supervising, and even evaluating students (Jettner, et al., 2017; Srinivas, et al., 2015; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Jettner and colleagues (2017) discussed the importance of faculty investment in SL to work on both the development and maintenance of relationships.

Students who have engaged in direct service often lack an adequate amount of time to develop relationships with clients during a semester-long class (Stoecker, et al., 2009). According to Stoecker and colleagues (2009), this type of semester-long direct service should either be avoided or carefully planned. Gerstenblatt (2014) found that a long-term investment in relationship development between faculty and community partners must be both mutual and genuine.

Communication

Communication has served essential functions for community partners including relationship building, planning for, and reflecting on SL experiences, and learning from current experiences to improve future experiences (Jettner, et al., 2007; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Communication with faculty or students has been a common challenge for community partners (Kerrigan, et al., 2015). Good communication with faculty has demonstrated to the partners that they were valued and makes future partnerships much more likely (Stoecker, et al., 2009).

Communication between community partners, faculty and students is crucial in all stages of SL (Jettner, et al., 2007; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Sandy and Holland (2006) recommended faculty visit the sites and spend some time volunteering there in order to comprehend the community partner organization and the resources they provided. Ongoing conversations between community partners and faculty about the process and outcomes of the SL experience for community partners, students, and faculty have been key to a successful SL experience (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Roles

For the SL experience to be most effective, the roles that faculty, students and community partners play must be clear to everyone involved. The focus on roles covers formal agreements and the training, preparation, supervision and evaluations of students.

Researchers discussed the utilization of formal agreements as a strategy for providing clarity with regard to roles (Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy and Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Stoecker and colleagues (2009) found memorandums of understanding were an effective strategy for clarity regarding the various roles of those involved in SL. These documents should include a clear articulation of responsibilities and time commitments for students, faculty, and community partners (Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Memorandums of understanding promote accountability through the clarification of roles with regard to training and preparation, supervision, and evaluation of students.

A concern expressed by community partners has been a lack of training and preparation of students (Budhai, 2013). Most often training has fallen on the community organization which may or may not have the staff and time available to adequately train and prepare students (Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Training needs of students, beyond those that directly relate to working within the community partner organization, including those directly related to learning outcomes, require the involvement of faculty (Stoecker, et al., 2009).

Supervision of students most often has fallen to community partners (Sandy and Holland, 2006; Srinivas, et al., 20015; Stoecker, et al., 2009). While this may make some sense since the service most often takes place at the facilities of the community partners, supervision has required time and energy on the part of community partners and often was a burden to them (Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinkler, et al., 2014).

At times the responsibility of community partners was simply to keep track of student hours though activity logs, but effective partnerships can include additional roles for community partners in the evaluation of students (Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinkler, et al., 2014). Tinkler and colleagues (2014) suggested ongoing feedback between community partners and faculty to alert faculty to concerns long before the end of the semester.

Community partners expressed a need for ongoing faculty oversight of SL projects (Rinaldo, et al., 2015). They advised that faculty clearly lay out the time commitments and roles of community partners in advance and monitor the process as it unfolds. community partners, in a study by Sandy and Holland (2015), want equitable leadership with faculty. In other words, supervision should be a clearly defined collaboration between community partners and faculty. In a study by Karasik (2020), community partners recommended that faculty need to play a strong role in creating partnerships that are equitable, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial.

Benefits

Community partners articulated several ways in which SL benefited them, their organizations and the communities they serve. The most tangible benefit was an increase in organizational capacity (Cronley, et al., 2015; James & Logan, 2016; Jettner, et al., 2017; Rinaldo, 2015; Sandy, 2006; Stoecker, 2009). Being co-educators and inspirations to students was also found to be a benefit for community partners (Budhai, 2013; Petri, 2015; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2019). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, SL helped to fulfill organizations' missions (Petri, 2015; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinker, et al., 2014).

Increasing the capacity of the organization was one reason community partners involved themselves with SL in the first place (Stoecker, et al., 2009). James and Logan (2016) discussed how SL increased organizational reach and power for community partners. They also found SL students increased the types of services offered and the number of clients served by community partners. Students also bring new ideas that are informed by their academic learning to community partners (Sandy and Holland, 2006).

Taking on the role of co-educators of future workers in their field was discussed by community partners in several studies (Budhai, 2013; Petri, 2015; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Sandy and Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2019). The concept of mentoring the next generation of workers in the field was mentioned by

community partners (Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Stoecker, et al., 2009). Community partners see SL as a strategy for creating future staff, donors and volunteers among the SL students (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, et al., 2009).

Effective SL has helped community partners fulfill their organizational missions (Stoecker, et al., 2009). In fact, the value of SL for community partners can be assessed by determining if and how much the SL contributes to the mission of the organization (Rinaldo, et al., 2015). Student learning outcomes must be balanced with outcomes related to organizational mission (Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinker, et al., 2014). This attention to organizational mission must be a part of the planning, implementation and evaluation of SL projects and activities (Stoecker, et al., 2009; Tinkler, et al., 2014). Having the organization mission and the student learning outcomes as the two areas of focus for SL experiences provides the cornerstone of the mutually beneficial relationships essential to effective and lasting partnerships (Tinkler, et al., 2014).

Power

Often there is an underlying philosophy in SL where students are seen as doing charity for those less privileged in the communities they serve (Stoecker, et al., 2009). This leads to the idea of student service always being a good thing for community partners and diminishes the efforts of the community partner in serving students. Expecting efforts on the part of community partners can seem like a fair exchange for receiving free services from students, but this does not take into account the burdens put on community partners when hosting SL students. Clearly articulating roles that are created and agreed upon by both faculty and community partners can help lessen the burden and provide for more shared power between faculty and community partners (Jettner, et al., 2014).

Gerstenblatt (2014) found that a core principle of SL was creating reciprocal relationships that were useful to both students and community partners. Reciprocity is vital for all those involved including community partners, students and faculty (James & Logan, 2016). Doran and colleagues (2021) used a relational approach to investigate relationship issues and power dynamics between community partners and faculty. They found a need for recognizing power dynamics throughout the engagement process, mutual benefit in partnerships, and more equitable balance between faculty and community partners in decision making. This requires a new perspective and a bridging of two different worlds: academia and service institutions (Sandy and Holland, 2006). Tyron and Madden (2019) found a lack of alignment between the goals and values of academia and service institutions. This misalignment created a power imbalance. Communication is essential to defining and supporting the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in SL in order to overcome invisible yet problematic power dichotomies. Developing and revising roles requires relationship building and time (Tinkler, et al., 2014). Often the short-term nature of SL makes relationship building difficult and the issues of power invisible.

Power is a multidimensional and multifaceted concept with a rich and dynamic body of work within the social science research literature. Within a social context, power indicates a hierarchical relationship that is the result of ongoing interactions of human beings (Wartenberg, 1990). Power can be conceptualized as both a positive and a negative construct. According to Weber and colleagues (1958) power is the ability to get your way even when others resist, representing a largely negative facet of the construct. Power can also be viewed as a positive aspect of social functioning important for success in group settings (Arendt, 1970). Relational power is about one individual's power over another. Structural power reflects the same hierarchy as relational power but is focused on how an institution or organization has power over individuals or groups.

Budhai (2013) discussed the need for additional studies focusing on the experiences of community partners in order to "add to the voice of the communities in concert with the experiences of students" (p.8). Cronley and colleagues (2015) stressed the need for scholarship in SL to recognize the significant role of community partners. Karasik (2020) stated the importance of community partners perspectives in order to create true partnerships between campus and community. Kimme Hea and Wendler Shah (2016) also reinforced the need for additional research that explores community partners stakes in the SL relationships.

The study we present helps to provide community partners with more of a voice regarding their experiences with SL. While previous research explored the successes and challenges for community partners in SL, our study focused on relational and organizational power and how power dichotomies can work to help and hinder effective SL experiences for community partners using the voices of the community partners themselves. This focus on power from a community partner perspective adds important voices and perspectives to the current body of knowledge regarding SL.

Methods

A list of SL community partners, expanding over the last five years at Georgia Southern University, served as the basis for identifying community partner organizations to interview for this research. Georgia Southern University is a large liberal arts university with approximately 27,000 students across three campuses. Each campus is found in a different community in southeastern Georgia, including the main campus housed in Statesboro, a small city of approximately 33,000, and two smaller campuses in Savannah and Hinesville, Georgia. After institutional review board approval was obtained (IRB #H19288), current and recent SL community partners were identified and asked, via email, to participate in an interview to gather feedback regarding their experience(s) working with students on SL projects.

To diversify the types of organizations participating, the following community partner attributes were collected: interviewee demographics, organization characteristics, and service-learning characteristics (i.e., type of service, length of relationship, departmental partnerships, etc.). Community partners interviewees ranged in age from 22 to 78 with a mean age of 50. Five were men and 16 were women. Three identified as African American and the rest, 18, identified as Caucasian. Eleven of the organizations had fewer than 20 employees, four had between 20 and 100 employees and five were part of a large national organization. For SL characteristics, all of the service-learning activities for all community partners were direct service. Students interacted directly with clients or constituent groups. All but one relationship between community partners and the university lasted at least one year. In some classes, service-learning projects were required as part of the class activities (n = 9); for others, it was offered as an option for students (n = 7). Four of the community partners did not respond to the question.

This study used qualitative face-to-face structured interviews and we then identified themes and subthemes related to community partners experiences with SL projects. Questions were based on an initial literature review of the topic. A total of 20 structured interviews were conducted with each interview lasting 35 to 45 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Most interviews were conducted by a student team that consisted of one undergraduate or graduate student. Remaining interviews were conducted by the lead author.

Coding Procedure and Analysis

After an extensive review of the literature and a review of journal notes by researchers taken during the interview process, an a priori codebook (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) was created and entered into NVivo software (QSR, 2020). This was done so that all three coders used the same codebook. Codes were derived from the literature, field notes from the various interviews and discussions of the research team. These strategies produced 36 secondary codes related to the following 11 primary codes: focus (benefits/challenges), type of service (direct, indirect, etc.), demographics of interviewees, people involved in the partnership (e.g., students, faculty, community partners), time factors (e.g., calendars, short-term service), communication (e.g., planning, relationship building), culture, diversity, roles of participants (e.g., supervision, MOUs, power differentials), benefits of service-learning, and sustainability (related to the UN sustainable development goals).

Three researchers conducted the coding. One researcher had expertise in the administration of SL within the university setting, two were professors with experience implementing SL in their classrooms. Of the two professors, one had expertise in relational power issues and the other had expertise in macro level issues of power. Two researchers coded each transcript in order to allow for coding and thematic development comparisons. The three researchers shared online notes and had regular discussions during

the analysis. The researchers coded using NVivo software (QSR, 2020). The research team regularly discussed themes and subthemes collectively both during and at the completion of all transcript coding to provide investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002). The three researchers conducting the analysis agreed on the multiple themes as they emerged.

When exploring the code of power, a subtheme of roles, it became evident that this was an important topic that had yet to be fully explored in previous research relative to the role of community partners in service learning. The researchers identified the following themes – relational power, structural power, and parties involved – and recoded the transcripts using the three primary codes and 19 secondary codes.

Table 1
Coding framework for power

Primary Code	Secondary Code (interviewees/coded text)
Relational Power	Relinquishing power (1/1) Power over others (5/8) Communication issues related to power (6/7) Equity or balanced power (6/6) Decision making (1/1)
Structural Power	Hierarchy (6/8) Communication issues related to power (1/1) Equity or balanced power (3/3) Decision making (3/3) Relinquishing power (2/2) Clarity of roles (4/5)
Parties Involved	Students (16/38) Faculty (16/35) Community Partners (16/60) University staff (1/1) Student facilitator (0/0) Clients (4/4) University (1/3) Multiple (6/6)

Results

The findings of this study are divided into two major sections: relational and structural power. Relational power is situated within personal relationships (Weber et. al., 1958) and reflects power dichotomies between individuals. Within this context, individuals include faculty, university staff, students, community partners and the clients within community partners' programs. Relational power focusses on individual or micro level issues. Structural power reveals power issues at a more macro or organizational level. SL bridges what can be two very different organizational structures: institutions of higher education and community service organizations. As mentioned previously, power can be both positive and negative. Power issues become problematic when one organizational structure (e.g., a university, community agency, etc.) exerts power over another. Table 1 provides some quantifications regarding the secondary coding for

power codes. Sixteen out of 20 community partners mentioned issues related to power. There are 23 quotes for the theme of relational power and 22 quotes for the theme of structural power. These included power issues between students, faculty, community partners, university staff, clients, and the university. The majority of the coded quotes demonstrated power issues between dichotomous categories of individuals or groups but there are six quotes that involve more than two types of individuals or groups. Table 1 provides information regarding both the number of community partners who had quotes coded for each of the secondary codes (interviewees) along with the total number of quotes attached to each subtheme (coded text).

Relational Power

This section on relational power presents four themes: power over others, power and communication, relinquishing power, and equity or balanced power. A variety of relationships are explored within each theme. Most often these relationships are between faculty, students and community partners. Each of these individuals takes a different place in the relational power structure.

Power over others

Relational power is hierarchical (Arendt, 1970; Weber, et. al., 1958). One person can have power over others. This was revealed in a variety of ways from our community partner interviews. One challenge is the number of people in various roles involved in SL projects. In most projects, there are faculty, students, community partners and others involved. Often there is no clear hierarchical structure for the relationships involved in SL and this leads to unexpected and challenging power dynamics. For example, community partners might see students as having power over them. Faculty, on the other hand, may hold the view that community partners wield power over students whom they supervise at the community site.

Community partners discussed their lack of input on projects. Most often they are told what the students would be doing by the faculty member. A staff member from a local after school program stated, “It would be nice if they asked, you know ‘hey what do we need to target?’ or ‘what’s going on in your specific area at the moment?’ and going after that stuff...it would definitely help out more.” Without input on the projects, community partners lose power to the faculty member who, guided by student learning objectives, may have their own ideas about what they want the students to provide. In this way, things the community partner may not need are provided and things they do need are not addressed.

Not just projects but also procedures can be in the hands of the faculty who are not involved directly in the implementation of projects. A director of the local elder service program stated, “There’s [a] project which they could get a number of hours if they followed through. Although that is not [faculty member’s name]’s favorite...she doesn’t really like them working independently. She’d rather have them in the office.” Here the faculty member was giving input into how the project should be run by the community partner. She wanted students to work with direct supervision. This may not have been what was best or easiest for the community partner, but the partner saw the faculty member as having a say into how things should be run. In that way a faculty member had power over the community partner adding additional work for the community partner who had to directly supervise the students.

One of the ways that faculty exert power over their students is the way they set up the SL component of their class. One community partner stated, “Some professors only offer it for extra credit so those students have no complaints...but the ones that it’s mandatory for their class, they almost feel somewhat burdened by it because they’re trying to fit it into their schedule.” When SL is mandatory, it can seem like a burden put in place by the professor. The same activity, when optional, leads to no complaints. When complaints occur and affect the work, they fall on the community partner to manage. Each of these examples echoed Doran and colleagues’ (2021) assertion that there is a need for more equity between faculty and community partners in decisions that are made within the scope of SL activities.

Within SL settings, students also exert power over other students, setting up challenging group dynamics. One community partner described it this way:

> Sometimes you get students that aren't very motivated. They don't really want to be there, and they make it real obvious. Sometimes that [affects] some of the other students who kinda seem like they were ready and gung-ho at first and they saw someone who was kinda like, 'Yeah this isn't really for me and I'm just here cuz I gotta be. And I don't wanna do it' and they just kind of hide over there in the corner on their phone or something and then it just kind of brings down the group.

Another community partner discussed the issue on an individual level, "If the student has the attitude that they're going to do what they have to do to get by, it's not very useful...it really just depends on the attitude of the student." Students' attitudes can have power over the community partner if they are unable to get the students to do the work that is required and has an effect on the whole project.

At times, community partners are able to create hierarchies where they have power over students. One community partner related it to family hierarchies. "I get on to them like a mom, I'm like 'Why don't you have your paper?' or 'How come you don't have enough hours? It's almost time.' And they just kind of laugh, but I think it's been great." One community partner discussed challenges with students' apparent disregard for the work. She stated:

> I even had a student that said 'well, when I signed up for this class, I didn't realize that this was gonna be the project that we were working on,' and it's like, 'What does it matter when you are going to be learning something that is applicable to your degree?'

For the community partner this type of talk devalued their work and related a perception of hierarchy where the academic learning had value over SL. More importantly, that devaluing is directed at someone who is taking time to work with students to teach them skills related to their academic learning.

One point that was brought up by several community partners related to how students procrastinated doing their service hours, and then came to the community partner expecting the partner to make effort into correcting a problem created by the student. In this way, students appeared to wield power over community partners. One community partner stated:

> A week before [the deadline] a guy messaged me like, 'Hey I didn't do any of my hours, I need to do them all now.' And I'm like, 'You can't get 40 hours in 1 week' ...So that was definitely a struggle.

While providing what the students needed was challenging for community partners, they were willing to give over power and their time to provide what the students needed.

Students' impact on other students and their overall attitude toward their engagement in SL activities is a critical factor for community partners. Hea and Shah (2016) found that a primary motivator for the participation of community partners is the enthusiasm and energy students bring to their projects. An apparent lack of enthusiasm on the part of the student may have a deleterious impact on the relationship between the community partners and student and/or the faculty member.

Power and communication

The ways that things are either communicated or not communicated can have consequences that relate to power. For instance, one community partner discussed how a faculty member sent a student to do community service with her organization without explaining essential aspects about the program's moral stand on a sensitive issue. Because the faculty member had power over the student, the student felt an obligation to perform service at an organization that was not a good fit philosophically. This led to problems for both the community partner and the student. The community partner stated:

> We had a girl a couple weeks ago who just was not on board with this and we apologized for...making the appointment and her coming in but it's really the fault of her professor who sent her here without giving her a heads up that this is what we do… [O]ne sort of complaint about professors is that [the students are] not educated about [what] we're doing.

Several community partners discussed the challenge of faculty not communicating. One community partner stated, "There are faculty members that, they're just difficult to work with. They're difficult to try and get

responses from." Another stated, "They [students] came from a professor but I never heard from those professors, so I would just hear from the students." Communication challenges with faculty could take multiple forms. The lack of communication demonstrates that the work of supervising and supporting students could be given to the community partner by the faculty member, but the power remained with the faculty member. One community partner expressed why good communication between the faculty member and the community partner is essential. They said, "What would really help [is] for faculty to be more intentionally involved so they can have a more realistic expectation of what an affiliate can do with a student." When power was controlled by faculty but work and responsibility is given to community partners without communication, there were challenges that affect everyone involved.

Effective communication developed over time. One long time community partner talked about how long-term relationships with faculty could lead to relationships where power was not driving the relationship. They stated:

> Our organization has been here long enough and I've been here long enough. I know most of the departments on campus, the department heads, and faculty in those departments. I'm very confident that anytime that we need anything, I can call them up and get a positive response.

When effective relationships between the community partners and faculty do not exist, students can then hold power over the community partners. A community partner stated:

> The effort that goes into corralling [students] is pretty significant and frustrating really and there's such a disconnect...They'll leave me and go to the professor and if I don't have good relationships with the professors, who knows what kind of impression they could walk away with.

In this way the students have power over the community partner. Regular communication with the faculty member can help but the norm for community partners in this study was that communication between them and the faculty was infrequent. One community partner discussed a time where there was regular communication. She stated:

> The one project...We had like a pre-meeting just to be sure that we were gonna be on board and that this was gonna be a help. Then we met a couple of other times during the project. I went to the presentation at the end, so probably six times the whole project we met.

Doran et al. (2021) argue that the communication process is a central element in building respect within the SL relationship. Ongoing communication allows for clear definitions of roles and a positive experience for the community partner.

Relinquishing power

Turning power over to another person requires trust. Trust develops over time (Wang, et al., 2010) but often SL projects last for a short period of time. Some projects only last a few weeks or a few months making relationship development between community partners and students difficult. This leads to a lack of commitment from students. One community partner stated:

> They [students] are more concerned about getting their hours than learning. Um, they try to get out of stuff. They don't try at all. If they come in a group, they don't do anything and one person ends up getting all of the responsibility.

The lack of relationship-building leads to what community partners perceived as a limited commitment on the part of students. In this way, community partners felt that students are demonstrating power over them since they were counting on the students to do their work.

Another community partner reflected on the work of a student, where a relationship had already been established. She stated, "Sometimes they've already helped us so they call me and say, 'Can we do this? Can we meet?' And...so we'll meet 'cause they already have had some interaction with us from the past.

So that's happened several times." Having a trusting relationship with the student from the past allowed the community partner to relinquish power to the student.

Relinquishing power can have benefits for the community partners. One community partner stated, "I would just leave it up to them, the nursing supervisor or the students, to decide what paths to go down." With trust the work for the community partner can lessen by giving power over to faculty and students.

Equity or Balanced Power

Not all relationships described by community partners were about power dichotomies. At times community partners described balanced partnerships. One area discussed by partners was offering input into project design. When asked if they had input into the projects, one longtime community partner stated, "As far as the project themselves? Deciding what plants and things like that and deciding whats and wheres? yes ma'am." In fact, this community partner also talked about power balances where the students had some ability to influence decision making. She stated, "And sometimes we're able to just say, 'Hey, we got these plants and you decide where they go.' And I think students actually enjoy that a little better." Unlike earlier examples where students took power from the community partner, here the power was given to the students. This surrendering of power on the part of the community partner can lead to some very effective results. This same community partner stated:

> So when we can integrate students, it really benefits both sides of things. We don't ever want it to feel like students are just coming out here trying to do free labor. We want them to take away from it too. I wanted it to be mostly for them, but we benefit from it because it allows us more natural landscape that has different things in it.

Balancing power can create a positive service learning experience for community partners.

Another community partner described balance in this way: "Part of it has been, again, just reciprocal learning. So anytime we can spend time together I'm learning from them and they're learning from me and like we're learning from each other." While power is a factor in the relationships between faculty, students and community partners involved in SL, there are times when power is balanced rather than hierarchical. Overall, the importance of equitable and balanced approaches to SL found in this study align with previous research. Specifically, Doran et. al., (2021) posit that community partners desire a shared approach to decision making and relationships grounded in open communication. Karasik (2020) describes the mutual benefits to community partners and students as a "win for all sides" (p. 129).

Structural Power

Each organization in service-learning, the university and the community service organization, has its own hierarchies of power. When there is a partnership between organizations, power differentials may create hierarchies between the organizations. Most often community partners reflect on how the university had power over the community service organization. Structural power is reflected in three themes: organizational structures, timeframes, and roles.

Organizational structures

Community service organizations are guided by their mission and goals that focus on the communities they serve. Universities have missions and goals that include a primary focus on the education of students. Structural power issues come into play when the education of the students or the learning outcomes of a class are prioritized over the mission and goals of the organization hosting SL. One community partner stated, "We can just spend hours and hours with students and it does nothing for our mission."

When community partners have power in the decision making about projects, they can tailor them to address their organizational mission. One community partner stated:

> We don't start a project unless it's part of our mission. They [students] don't come in and design exactly what they're gonna do. We talk about what we need, and we work together to design that, and then we go from there.

When community partners have power in their relationships with faculty and students, they can intentionally address their own mission while also assisting in the learning of students.

Academic workflow for students is done through assignments which are graded. Students are told in advance about the assignments and how they will be evaluated. Community organizations work differently. Often work is assigned and altered along the way based on changing needs of the organization and work is rarely directly evaluated. While these are different processes, they can be reconciled with good communication between the organizations. Several community partners discussed their lack of understanding regarding the expectations for students. One community partner stated:

> We don't know what is required of the students. If there's paperwork, like I know there's journals, but we don't know if there [are] specific questions from the journal. So, I never know whether [the service experiences] would even address what they need or not.

Without a clear understanding of learning expectations, community partners were put in a lower power position than the students. They lack the power to effectively guide student learning.

Timeframes

Most community organizations' work revolves around a twelve-month calendar. Sometimes that is a fiscal year and sometimes it is a calendar year. University academic calendars are broken into smaller segments such as semesters, often with summers off. Many community partners expressed their frustration with working with students around the academic calendar, as students were available for only a month or two, making relying on them difficult. Also, if students do direct service and begin relationships with clients, those clients may suffer when the students leave. A community partner discussed the challenges for the clients they served in this way, "In terms of construction, we're dead in the water from about a week from Thanksgiving until about 3 weeks into January. We're just dead...We can't make progress." The university calendar has power over the organization's calendar leaving community organizations with a lack of student support over large chunks of the year.

When asked about the challenges of working with the university, several community partners discussed the challenges of inconsistency over time. One community partner stated, "The disadvantage is the inconsistency. Semester to semester changes. We may have 300 students involved this semester and then only have 50 next semester. There's no way to judge that semester to semester."

Sustainability is also an issue. One partner described this challenge:

> So, if you have for one semester a student of class participating in a SL project, you implement the activity or the service, and then the next semester, those resources may not be there. And so, it's difficult to find a replacement to sustain that service.

Community partners become accustomed to having a student or a class providing support, and then once the semester is over, they stop showing up, and the cycle repeats itself every semester.

Roles

When done effectively, community partners play the role of co-educators with faculty. One community partner described it this way:

> It's trying to make a personal impact on the students along with broadening their knowledge. But I really hope their take-away from it is that: one, they learned a new skill, so how to properly plant something, how to properly identify something, and to know...the benefits of having biodiversity and why it's important.

While this learning might not align with the learning objectives for the course, it does align with the mission of the organization and the learning that is taking place can have equal or greater impact compared to the learning taking place in the classroom.

The university where the study took place has community liaisons that worked for the university and helped to bridge the gap between the university and the community organizations. Several community partners discussed this important role. One community partner stated:

> Well, I know with our [organization, it] has really been beneficial to have that community liaison that handles all of that 'cause before that...there was sometimes a little bit of a disconnect. But now there's a community liaison, who is responsible for making sure...that they sent me the list of supplies they need and I get it to them and then they distribute it out to schools and to their students that are coming into the program.

Considering the challenges of working in two different types of organizational structures, having people who are responsible for working between organizations, university and community organizations, can be very helpful. This role was described by another community partner, "There's usually a facilitator of some sort that puts the calendar up and such...They really have done their due diligence of making sure the students are aware of the things that they'll need." The facilitator served as the link between the faculty member and the community partner.

Roles can also change over time. One community partner discussed how they used the SL experience to find future staff this way, "We do use some of these opportunities ...as recruitment opportunities for employment. We have ended up employing quite a few of the students who started out either volunteering or doing a service-learning project."

Another way of bridging the gap between the university and the community organization was described by a community partner in this way, "They [faculty member] became a board member and so they were in on the planning and operation. So, in that respect, they were kind of integrated into the leadership of the [name of organization]." When considering that there is a hierarchy where the university has power over the community organization, these unique roles help to connect the two organizations and reduce the challenges of inter-organizational hierarchies.

As mentioned above, each organization in SL partnerships have their own hierarchies of power that dictate their own policies and procedures. When there is a partnership between organizations, the need arises for a shared understanding of policies and procedures between the two organizations (Pustovitovskij & Kremer, 2011). A misalignment between the goals of the SL organization and the university can contribute to an imbalance of power (Tyron & Madden, 2019) and the loss of an important partner.

Discussion

This study heeds the call of Cronley et. al., (2015), Karasik (2020), and Kimme Hea and Wendler Shah (2016) who urge for an examination of the significant role community partners play within the SL relationship and the importance of their perspective within the relationship. Examining both relational and structural power dynamics, we attempt to add important nuances to the current body of knowledge.

Relational Power

Relational power, reflecting power dichotomies between individuals (Weber et. al., 1958), can be difficult to manage within the scope of SL relationships. University faculty, students, and community partners each have goals for their work together and these goals can create competing demands. Our research identified themes reflecting the complexity of the relational power dynamics within SL experiences on our campus: (1) power over others; (2) power and communication; (3) relinquishing power; and (4) equity or balanced power.

Power Over Others

It is not surprising that our interviews found multiple examples of the theme of power over others**.** From the community partners' perspective, faculty have power over community partners and students, and students have power over other students and community partners. These 'power over' relationships lead to community partners' perspectives of having little to no input into the projects and procedures occurring at their sites, and to experiences that community partners believed were burdensome, challenging, and devaluing. This includes having adequate time and resources to prepare for the service-learning activities. Remedies such as allowing community partners to have input into projects and processes, informing students at the beginning of the semester about the project and providing an alternative assignment as needed, and empowering community partners to set limits and boundaries with students can equalize power dynamics within the faculty-community partner-student relationship (Karasik, 2020). In essence, seeing the community partners as a full partner or co-educator with the faculty member better serves the students, faculty, and community partners (Budhai, 2013) and has the potential to balance the power dynamics within the relationship.

Communication

While often a challenge within the community partners-student-faculty relationship (Kerrigan, et al., 2015), communication (or the lack thereof) had important consequences on the SL dynamic and impacts power within the faculty, community partner, and student relationship. Community partners shared examples of communication failures that lead to significant mismatches between student site placement and community organizations as well as faculty who are difficult to contact. These situations contributed to poor faculty-community partners relationships. One community partner shared feeling insecure about the messages students may have been communicating to faculty and the impression the faculty could have of the community partner. They also shared stories of long-term partnerships where community partners felt confident that, if needed, they could reach faculty and get a positive result. This underscores the need for regular and effective communication between faculty and community partners.

Relinquishing Power and Equitable or Balanced Power

Relinquishing power requires the development of trust over time (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Since most SL experiences are short-term, they do not, in and of themselves, facilitate the natural building of trust. When there are opportunities for students and community partners to build upon existing positive experiences community partners had with past SL projects, trust is more likely to be a byproduct and community partners are more likely to relinquish their hold on power. The same can be said for the relationship between faculty and community partners. Long-term relationships between faculty and community partners can lead to more trusting and equitable or balanced power relationships from the point of view of the community partners we interviewed. Specifically, our interviews revealed that power equity was created when decision making was shared and there was opportunity for input into project design.

Structural Power

For this study, structural power was seen in the relationship between the two organizations involved: the university and the community organization. Three themes are reflected in the interviews: (1) organizational structure: (2) timeframes: and (3) roles. In interviews, community partners reflected on challenges and benefits of agencies' partnerships with the university.

Organizational Structures

The needs of the organizational structures, the university and the community agency, can create demands that compete for attention. When the needs of one entity outweighs the needs of the other, unequal power dynamics occur and create the potential for negative outcomes (Tyron & Madden, 2019). For

example, one community partners felt as though they spent a significant amount of time with a student yielding no value added for the mission of their organization. In this scenario, the university and their structure held power over the community agency. When community partners have a voice in the decision-making around student projects' however, community partners can help to ensure that projects meet both course learning outcomes and the mission of the community agency, thereby sharing power between the two power structures.

The differences in workflow between the university and the community agency can also be a structural challenge to overcome. While university coursework tends to be very structured and regimented, workflow at the community agency may have community-level influences that require them to be more flexible and alter their work plan in midstream based on changing needs. This further reiterates the importance of communication at the relational level.

Timeframes

Arguably, one of the most challenging structural power dynamics to overcome in the university-community agency relationship relates to timeframes. Universities and community agencies often function on very different calendars creating difficulties when it comes to scheduling students for SL work and compounding logistical challenges for community partners (Sandy & Holland, 2006). By dictating the beginning and ending of the academic terms as a timeframe, the university wields a significant amount of power over when students can begin and end their SL experiences. This is especially impactful if students are expected to do direct service work with clients. The shortened on-site experience makes forming relationships with clients difficult (Stoecker, et al., 2009). Because of the cyclical nature of academia, sustainability is also an issue. Students who create and implement a service project one semester will not be in the same class the next semester to sustain the project. In addition, organizations who count on students for a significant portion of their workforce are forced to scale back during periods when the university is on break. One solution may be to adopt a long-term student-teaching type of model from teacher education programs. The creation of a series of multi-term/semester projects that carry over from one class to another where students have the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time in one community setting would solve several problems from the point of view of community partners: (1) it would allow students a longer term of engagement with community partners and clients within the community setting; (2) it would lessen the need for administrative work and start-up training on the part of the community partners and the faculty member in the second half of the course/SL partnership as that would have occurred during the initial course; and (3) it would provide a longer period of time for goals and priorities to be met. Even with the significant interruption of winter, summer or spring breaks, transitioning back into the start-up phase would potentially be a much smoother process.

Roles

Community partners play a vital role in the SL partnership (Cronley et. al., 2015) and the community partners interviewed in this study had largely positive perceptions about the part they play. Community partners think of themselves as co-educators alongside faculty, ensuring students have an understanding of the mission of the organization, not just the learning objectives of the class. They spoke with positive regard about the community liaisons that worked to bridge the gap between the university and the community organizations, and they spoke in positive terms about the changing roles of both students and faculty within the community organization. In their own way, each of these is an example of a leveling of power at the structural level: fulfilling the mission of the community agency while also supporting the learning objectives of the class; working with the community liaison to ensure needs at all levels are met; and building closer and more integrated relationships.

Barriers keeping structural power dynamics in place are more challenging to overcome. Because faculty and community partners may not have a direct line of contact with the university/agency structures, making changes at the structural level more difficult. Nevertheless, several strategies situated at the structural level may support more balanced power dynamics between universities and community agencies. These

strategies include developing memorandums of understanding; clear linkages between the SL project and course learning objectives; faculty members and community partners working as co-educators; open and consistent lines of communication; and advance planning of projects.

Implication for Practice

Creating partnerships between universities and community partners begins by ensuring that relationships are equitable, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial (Karasik, 2020). Based on this research, the authors make the following recommendations:

- Allowing community partners to have input into projects and processes to ensure that not only the goals and objectives of the course are being met, but also the goals, objectives, and mission of the organization are addressed
- Empowering community partners to set limits and boundaries with students including boundaries related to scheduling, dress/behavior code, and projects
- Ensuring reliable, consistent, and reciprocal communication strategies between faculty, students, community partners, and other administrative bodies involved
- Creating multi-term projects that allow students to spend extended time in community-based sites
- Clearly articulated and agreed upon roles for all partners: students, faculty, community partners

Study Limitations and Future Research

Our study only begins to unpack the power dynamics at play within relational and structural power relationships and is limited by a few important factors. First, this study is limited by the small number of community partners who chose to participate. Future research should include a wider perspective of community partners and should also include the perspectives of faculty, students, university administrators, those who work with SL programs as well as administrators of community agencies with regard to both relational and structural power in SL relationships. This would bring both depth and breadth to the larger field of work. Another limitation of this study is the relative lack of diversity within the community partners participants. The vast majority of community partners were long-term SL participants and likely have built high levels of trust with an individual faculty member and/or the administrative office whose role it is to oversee SL efforts on our campus. Intentionally seeking out community partners who are new partners or who only served in the role for a short term might provide a more robust source of data from which to draw conclusions, especially since there is some literature that links trust to power. This study could also benefit from further diversifying the community partners pool based on race. It may be interesting to examine community partners who are minoritized as they interact with students and faculty who are predominantly white and from predominantly white institutions of higher education. Since the majority of the interviews in our study were conducted by student teams, this may have had an impact on the results, especially since the focus was on power dichotomies. Future research would benefit from examining differences in responses that come from the roles of the individuals conducting the research. This study would also benefit from a closer examination of when issues of power occur within the SL relationship. Do problems occur at the beginning, middle, or toward the end of the project? Future research should seek to determine the specific phase of the relationship that may be problematic and provide specific solutions. In addition, this study did not explicitly ask participants about issues of power. Power is a theme that emerged from the data during the analysis phase. A more in-depth analysis of power dichotomies and relationships would benefit from asking specific questions related to power. Finally, a limitation of this study is that the organization and implementation of the study did not involve input from community partners. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of community partners throughout the research process.

Conclusion

Our research adds a novel perspective on the extant SL literature by contextualizing it within relational and structural power. At the relational level, faculty members may seem to be the obvious power-holders in the SL relationships in which they hold membership. They often dictate and approve the SL sites, they design and assign SL projects, and they frame the relationships that students ultimately build with community partners. Even the way faculty cultivate relationships between students and community partners, their involvement (or lack of involvement) is a powerful factor in the development of that relationship and may have lasting impacts. Faculty members are not the sole power-holders, community partners wield power over the SL site and the day-to-day operations occurring within. Because faculty are sometimes disconnected from the hands-on work happening on site, they often lack control (or power) over the actual experiences students have while at their field placements. This puts community partners in positions of power over students' learning in ways that are unattainable for faculty. Students are also power-holders within the SL dynamic. Their power, however limited, comes in the form of their compliance or noncompliance with the rules or guidelines of the faculty members and/or community partners. Students choose to arrive on time (or at all) at their SL site. Students choose to arrive having completed the appropriate paperwork and in the appropriate dress. Students choose to complete the required number of hours within the appropriate time frame. When students make these decisions, or choose not to make these decisions, they are wielding power.

In a similar vein, universities are power-holders in the structural relationship with community agencies. Universities provide an educated workforce and access to fresh talent and ideas. The power community agencies hold comes in the form of their ability to provide a space for real world learning and the ability to provide professional development and exposure for students that compliment, enhance, and sometimes challenge the academic work offered by the university. Given the importance of the relationship between all parties involved and the impact of power dynamics at both the relational and structural levels, we argue that faculty, community partners, students, universities, and community agencies would benefit from beginning a dialogue to understand the power dynamics at play, how they impact each partner, and how they can be managed to create more equitable and shared power structures.

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