Cocreating Scholarship in Praxis: The Practitioner-Scholar Bridging Campus and Community Engagement

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Introduction

On behalf of the editorial team of the *International Journal for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement* (*IJRSLCE*), the publication of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE), we are pleased to present this year's journal, Volume 11, Issue 1, 2023. We offer first an introduction to the "Special Focus" of this year's issue on IARSLCE's Practitioner-Scholar Community, including an expanded reflection on positionality in our field that draws upon our own experiences as practitioner-scholars. Following, we offer a preview of this volume's content and thoughts on coming priorities.

The Special Focus on the Practitioner-Scholar Community (PSC)

In 2021, the IARSLCE launched the "Practitioner-Scholar Community" (IARSLCE Practitioner-Scholar Community, n.d.). The goal of this IARSLCE program is to develop the capacity of IARSLCE members in order to (1) build their practitioner-scholar identity and (2) advance scholarly projects focused on service-learning and community engagement (SLCE) in order to support the IARSLCE's mission to build the field of research and scholarship of SLCE. There were cohorts in 2021–2022 and 2022–2023. Participants developed a scholarly project plan as they explored their practitioner-scholar identity and connected their practice to theory.

For 2023, the editorial leadership team of the *IJRSLCE* (Alan Bloomgarden and Susan Harris, coeditors, and Morgan Lewing, associate editor), supported by the IARSLCE leadership, undertook a special effort to solicit and feature scholarly work emerging from the PSC thanks to a proposal from the PSC's founding director, Patrick Green. The goal of creating a Special Focus in the *IJRSLCE* was to encourage members who complete the PSC with a scholarly project to pursue publication via submission to the *IJRSLCE*. The aim was to build a pipeline of scholarly activity between the PSC and the *IJRSLCE*, enriching the journal with voices and perspectives from those self-defining their professional identities at this junction of practice and theory so prevalent in our field.

From the outset, we shared a fundamental commitment to engaging in a supported learning process true to the spirit and values of our association. Practitioner-scholars engaged in educational development throughout 2021–2023 were offered support for scholarly mentorship around research projects developed through the PSC program. Those who participated in the PSC were invited to submit manuscripts for consideration in a Special Focus for the journal's 2023 volume. Authors were invited to include research and scholarly approaches to community engagement rooted in praxis, alternative community-based methods, and/or the articulation of scholarly approaches that emerge from practitioner-scholar conceptual frameworks and methodological rigor. PSC contributions were submitted and reviewed within the current sections of the journal's structure, stewarded through peer review by section editors. Manuscripts were given a hybrid of standard double-blind and special nonblinded review. Whereas *IJRSLCE* peer review normally assigns at least two reviewers to a double-blind process, PSC submissions were instead assigned one blind reviewer, with a second "mentor reviewer" from whom authors would gain guidance and feedback through the manuscript drafting and revision process.

Our editorial team recruited and matched established and mentor reviewers who are published scholars invited from among the journal's Editorial and Peer Review Boards to serve as volunteers to offer added support. "Mentor reviewers" were paired 1:1 with PSC participants to serve in a unique role to coach practitioner-scholar authors from drafting, to submission, through interpretation and response to a blind reviewer's, a section editor's, and ultimately an editorial leadership team member's feedback. Mentor reviewers conducted their own peer review of their mentee's manuscript, following the journal's standard process and evaluation template. They then served as a peer review coach, providing constructive feedback and support toward the goal of publication, offering ongoing editing support through each stage of review until decisions on their manuscript were final. Not all were ultimately

offered publication, but we are confident that all were given robust, substantive feedback and guidance. We also hope they were provided a meaningful experience with a peer review process for academic publishing. As a truly collaborative effort, support from the journal's section editors was vital. As they evaluated feedback from peer reviewers, we invited them to take a developmental view toward the nature and extent of the mentoring and revision, to encourage revision and author engagement with mentor reviewers. This meant providing even more extensive guidance to PSC authors in their analysis of reviewer feedback than might typically be expected. In all, this process helped to steward growth among PSC participants, enhance contributions in the manuscripts we are publishing here, and facilitate substantive, constructive feedback and guidance on those manuscripts not accepted, above and beyond what the journal can normally offer.

The PSC emerged from several iterations of preconference sessions and embedded conference sessions at the IARSLCE annual research conference, initially called the Practitioner-Scholar Forum. An initiative to shift this educational development program to an online format, consider asynchronous modalities, and build a curriculum that fosters scholarly products began in 2019. This became the project of the Scholar-in-Residence, an honorary role for a past IARSLCE Board chair, served by Dr. Patrick M. Green in 2019. Through planning with the IARSLCE Board and committee members for several years, the PSC was born, as described below:

> The Practitioner-Scholar Community (PSC) is a premier educational development program of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE). Since the role of many community engagement professionals (CEPs) includes that of practitioner-scholar, and many faculty and professionals who facilitate community engagement courses and programs find themselves in "third spaces"—the betwixt and between of theory and practice, of research and administration, of scholarly endeavors alongside program implementation, the PSC was developed to support the scholarly efforts of professionals in such third spaces. The development of practitioner-scholar capacity is an important aspect of IARSLCE, aligned with the organizational commitment to research and scholarship associated with community engagement. (https://www.iarslce.org/psc)

Through several years of development and in partnership with the Texas A&M University's continuing studies platform, the PSC launched with an initial cohort in January 2022 and followed up with a second cohort in fall 2022–winter 2023. A new cohort will be launched in 2024, as the PSC will continue to evolve under the guidance of Dr. Becca Berkey.

Challenges became readily apparent from each of these first two cohorts, namely, time, professional responsibilities, and a lack of support for scholarly efforts. The completion rate for the first cohort was less than 10% and the second cohort was less than 20%. The role of the practitioner-scholar, for many community engagement professionals, requires wearing many hats, serving in multidimensional roles, and recognizing the positionality as third-space professionals (Dostilio, 2017; Whitchurch, 2013). The phenomenon of interested individuals seeking to participate in this program, who then are unable to complete the program, challenges us to think about the positionality of practitioner-scholars. The push and pull of the community engagement professional workload is so demanding that professional development and scholarly work is often not prioritized, albeit scholarly contributions connecting theory and practice are essential for the community engagement field to grow. How do we address this tension?

Acknowledging the essential role that scholar-administrators play in filling the theory–practice gap, as well as how their community engagement professional functions provide distinct lines of inquiry, Green (2023) explains:

> Through inquiry and reflection, scholar-administrators have the opportunity to build from their local context, leveraging and generating local knowledge. In effect, practitioner research emerges from practice and anchors broad inquiry into the specific study of practice. This scholarly approach designs inquiry (or research) related to theory, explicitly connected to a theoretical framework or conceptual model. With experience as a rich source of knowledge, practitioner

> research allows practitioners to collect and analyze practice-based data that responds to the questions (inquiry) they have articulated. Such inquiry is rooted explicitly in the organization or community-based context of the practitioner. (p. 96, The Scholar-Administrator Imperative, https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/muj/article/view/26863)

Providing support for practitioner-scholars to engage in scholarly work is not only important but also an imperative to shape and grow the community engagement field. This requires that we redefine what it means to be practitioner-scholars in community engagement. Approaching practitioner-scholars as identities, roles, professional responsibilities/functions of work, and inclusive ways of being in higher education may be better descriptors for practitioner-scholars.

Across both cohorts, the PSC featured eight scholars who completed the program; the graduates were invited to submit their scholarly work to *IJRSLCE*, and each scholar was paired with a published scholar to mentor them through the process. The submissions then continued on through the *IJRSLCE* peer review process, and the editorial leadership of *IJRSLCE* carefully considered each submission through the process. The published pieces that emerged demonstrate how the practitioner-scholar approach honors inclusive practices in research and scholarship, featuring scholars of color and emerging scholars, first-time publications, and practices that stretch the community engagement field. Through these publications, we are reminded that the practitioner-scholar is not only an identity that includes more scholars but also an imperative that honors the diversity of the field, challenges us to embrace equity in pathways toward research and scholarship, and includes voices too often unheard. When we elevate the practitioner-scholar, the field expands, grows, and finds new lines of inquiry.

The new lines of inquiry that emerge expand our understanding of faculty, students, community partnerships, and institutional approaches in the community engagement context, leading to new epistemological approaches. For example, Berkey and Green critically reflect upon how the community engagement field and professional organizations have evolved, calling for new lines of inquiry on how professional organizations centered on community engagement may leverage their power collectively in *Exploring New Lines of Inquiry: A Practitioner–Scholar Inquiry of How Professional Organizations Have Evolved and Continue to Shape the Community Engagement Field.* In her scholarly work, *Seva + A Framework for ASLCE Practice and Research*, Grewal develops a theory-building approach with the Seva + framework, calling for an epistemological redefinition of academic service-learning and community engagement (ASLCE) approaches, specifically articulating new approaches to research and scholarship, different paradigms of practice, and resistance to the dominant academic norms to honor and reflect the unique positionalities, experiences, and agency of the person/community in ASLCE. Dempsey's *Community Engagement: A Retrospective Learning Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic* explores student learning through a case study methodology, analyzing the design of a retrospective, community engagement course created during the COVID-19 pandemic and examining students' critical reflections with emergent themes focusing on service experiences, relationship with the community, reflection and self-awareness, lessons learned for future service and career experiences, and the retrospective course experience. In *Exploring Faculty Satisfaction Derived From Community-Engaged Teaching in the COVID Era exploratory*, Carr-Lemke explores the impacts of community-engaged teaching on faculty satisfaction through a phenomenological study, identifying how community-engaged teaching contributes to a sense of satisfaction across pedagogical, professional, emotional, intellectual, and relational modes. Wendling and Evans consider institutional approaches to community engagement, as their study explores community engagement terminology within institutions' strategic plans and investigates how metrics assess institutional engagement efforts, with practical implications for strategic alignment of community engagement within institutional planning in *An Analysis of Community Engagement in Institution-Level Strategic Plans.*

Identity, Role, Responsibilities, and Ways of Being: Redefining Community Engagement Research, Scholarship, and Practice as Practitioner-Scholars

Upon my own role as a practitioner-scholar, instructor of the PSC, and guest editor for this Special Focus area, I (Patrick) recognize the multidimensional roles throughout this process. I am keenly aware of my identities and my positionality, although seeking to serve as a pathway paver, as a way maker for scholars, I see the system and infrastructure (peer review, editorial guidelines, limiting criteria for scholarly work) muting voices. Throughout this process, I became aware of how the established criteria for good research and scholarly approaches serve as a barrier for those operating from the lens of practice, from a different epistemological or cultural approach, and from a unique methodological lens of inquiry. In order to elevate the practitioner-scholar voice, we need to redefine practitioner-scholar beyond roles, functions, and/or identities to ways of being and thinking as an educator, a community member, and a scholar.

Similarly, I (Alan) have experienced this Special Focus as an opportunity to deepen, bring focus, and discover new vocabularies for these identities. My own career-long exploration of intersections between ideas and action, between scholarship and research-informed administration, and between learning, justice and liberation is embedded in an ecosystem of collaborations among higher education institutions, community organizations and residents, yet the interdependencies and dynamics of that ecosystem are not always seen or acknowledged by all who live within it. Like many of my colleagues in our community engagement field, I devote great amounts of time and effort in and among community settings seeking opportunities for collaboration and pathways to mutual understanding and benefit. It is a telling and probably common experience that I am consistently asked "What do you teach?" when I tell community leaders and residents I work for a college. I strongly suspect this is likely because that function, teaching, is the go-to, legible role for those outside the academy. Either way, while I have taught inside and outside of the classroom and curriculum, I have never held a faculty role. Likewise, I am asked "What is your field of scholarship?" and yet neither I have ever been able to build research activities into my professional responsibilities, nor have I ever defined (or been asked by an employer to define) publishing or presenting as priorities. I have held primarily administrative, programmatic, and managerial roles.

As an aside, consequent to these conditions, I note that minimal supports exist to enable (never mind empower) those with such multifaceted professional lives to work on these "extracurricular" or peripheral roles. As faculty members, it is frequently difficult to find rewards or support opportunities for training and support for the administrative roles many are asked to play—leading programs, grants, supervising staff, managing budgets. Similarly, few rewards and only privatized (personal) routes to education, training, and development exist for administrators to advance themselves as researchers, or as teachers. And yet we may be called upon, and often eager, to participate in educational and scholarly projects with colleagues on and off campus. Despite lofty and broadly stated missions to foster learning, more typically our institutions are prone to typecast, obstruct, or at least frustrate movement across these boundaries. We may sometimes find ways to talk about ourselves collectively as educators or coeducators, but divides of status, value, functions, and purpose still foster tensions that create and sustain more harm even than just insidious duplexity between scholarship and practice.

One more tension worth noting: In my roles as a grants and project development professional, I am asked often about the scale and sources of dollars I bring in for my institutions and their communities. Yet it has never been the dollars driving my work for me, nor do I believe for those with whom I collaborate and for whom I facilitate collaboration. The grants are a form of currency perhaps, but they do not represent the most significant or lasting metrics of my value. Knowing many colleagues in institutional and grants development, I believe we share larger commitments to public purposes in higher education, and often also to social change. When a valued colleague said about me in a reference that my community engagement work is about who I *am* more than about what I *do*, she spoke unknowingly to exactly what Patrick names—the aspiration we have to recognize this work as ways of being, ways of identifying as higher education professionals. In this IARSLCE community and beyond, we live among many for whom this is already true. There are a large and, I suspect, increasing number of professional roles and institutional functions represented at IARSLCE and hopefully other community engagement

gatherings—roles for which formal responsibilities and expectations of teaching and learning, research and scholarly production, community partnership development, and a wide range of programmatic and administrative responsibilities are conjoined, some intentionally and some haphazardly, and not all with the legibility of "community engagement" or its analog embedded within the title. Yet it remains vitally important that our publishing outlet and its community of scholars and stakeholders find ways to name and feature this special dimension of our field, not least because our sector, higher education, has not yet fully figured out, or committed to figuring out, how to support and nurture these identities; this work is at these crossroads of roles, functions, positionalities. This is critical if we are to become the inclusive, equitable partners in just, sustainable development our communities need us to be. This was a passionate motivation underpinning our drive to offer this volume's Special Focus.

We both would like to recognize that there is a strong thread of struggle running through the literature about SLCE and its practitioners. We can readily see the existential, epistemological, and corporal expressions of stress borne of the challenges of integration, balance, legibility, and sustainability. That struggle more broadly is the struggle of individuals and of a field for legitimacy as well as equity and justice, within the context of disciplines and institutions steeped in traditions and rarefied cultures. But both of us are also eager to affirm the joy in this work, and especially perhaps the joy in our positionality as practitioners, administrators, and scholars, for being engaged and for benefitting from the satisfaction and growth from working and living at this conjunction of campuses and communities, and at this meeting point of learning and social action. It would be an oversimplification to analogize the position we experience ourselves in as might other professional staff in higher education (teaching/learning, IT support, student affairs, etc.) as practitioners who bring specialized knowledge and current "best practices" and "research-based practices" to our work. Our collaborative work with community members, staff and leaders of agencies and programs, is by nature and by choice cocreative of the findings we leverage to improve our work, cocreation that must relentlessly strive to ground itself in reflexive work to ensure inclusive, equitable, and restorative justice. That cocreation means that the research we do is not just on topics and for purposes outside the academy but is conducted by design and principle in collaboration with those outside the academy. And not always for the purposes of publishing, presenting, or advancing knowledge in visible ways within the academy—maybe not even at all or ever for that audience, despite the fact that the writing and reading of published research is an activity more common and de rigueur within such environs. All this makes our position with regard to where knowledge and research comes from and happens different from those of our student affairs or other colleagues whose professionalism is otherwise very importantly tied to their maintaining currency and fluidity with latest ideas and practices. This is yet another way in which our relationship with scholarship as practitioner-scholars is woven with threads of resistance. As Patrick calls our writing an "act of resistance," so is the continual, persistent, and challenging work to decenter academics, the academy, and our students from the work of identifying, studying, and responding to societal challenges—it is work we do with and not for. That phrase is at once an expression now so intrinsic to our conception of our work and yet so elusive as a practice, so elusive to make valued and visible among our academy peers, and perhaps now even so overused and overpromising as to obscure its true meanings and genuine or authentic or successful implementation.

Preview of Volume 11

Turning to a preview of the content of Volume 11, we are pleased to publish articles in all of our major sections this year. In *Advances in Theory and Methodology*, Tania Mitchell and Carmine Perrotti lead with a substantial content analysis of service-learning syllabi, drawing as we anticipate others will upon the vast body of data emerging from the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification process. (Note, e.g., work underway via the ACE Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification Research Lab, as presented in a 2023 IARSLCE Preconference session.) This piece offers "a topographic view of service-learning practice using this broad data set to help us visualize the field" in ways readers will find helpful to organize discussion and analysis in a field characterized by many variations in our intent,

meaning, and application of terms and conceptual frames. Grounding a "landscape map" in syllabi as the "unit of analysis" presents an approach that goes beyond the more typical entry points we have to understanding through ex post facto presentations and publications by practitioner-scholars. Mitchell and Perrotte instead organize a large data set of syllabi into primary source material, creating opportunity for systemic and comparative analyses.

Genejane Adarlo, Urduja Amor, Agnes Garciano, and Juliet Dalagan bring to this volume's *Student Outcomes* section a case study at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. The authors explore the longitudinal effects of leadership development with students in health professions through service-learning, which draws upon a "social change model" framework constructed from various sources. Katherine Christoffersen, Aubrey Villanueva, and Ryan Bessett similarly build a rich view of student reflections on learning and meaning in service-learning over time. Examining interviews from student cohorts with a high proportion of Mexican American student participants at the U.S.-Mexico border, the authors examine community-engaged scholarship as a mode of learning, personal growth, and advancement of justice via engagement with sociolinguistic interview technique and analysis. In *"Poner en práctica" (Put into Practice): Impacts of Service-Learning for University Students in the Dominican Republic*, Megan Jeanette Myers employs qualitative interviews with Dominican students to explore their engagement with service-learning and academic content in a literature course. Of particular note are Myers's special efforts to contextualize this inquiry within significant public purposes embedded in missions of private Dominican institutions and to examine alignments and divergences of meanings and purposes in service-learning between North American contexts and Latin American and the Caribbean. In helping to bridge these historical and current discourses, Myers makes contributions both to the understanding of student outcomes and to global service-learning theory and practice.

This year's *Faculty Roles and Institutional Issues* section features a contribution from Joyce Bennett and Kimberly Sanchez that is a compelling and timely exhortation to SLCE practitioners to redouble efforts to prioritize and advance racial justice in practices of campus–community partnership. They name "nonprofit industrial complex" alignments that shape relations between and among college and community partners, in which it is often the larger and better-resourced education and social agencies of communities who have the resources, capacities, and shared social networks to support sustainable collaboration (Bloomgarden, 2017). The authors make clear that where such alignments obscure, diminish, or marginalize more radical revisioning of historically problematic power, race, and class dynamics in partnerships, we must do better to uphold and prioritize our values and aspirations to advance justice. Their proposed rubric provides powerful and concrete tools of analysis and action toward an antiracism praxis. The following section, *Community Partnerships*, continues the dialogue about integrating and sustaining justice work. Both Rebecca Dumlao and Sachiyo Shearman's *Conceptual Foundations for Collaborative Communication: A Framework and Practice for Community-Campus Partners* and *Deepening Community-Campus Relationships Using a Critical-Reflection Tool: A Multisite, Mixed-Methods Study* by Lori Kniffin, Patti Clayton, Jasmina Camo-Biogradlija, Mary Price, Robert Bringle, and Haden Botkin center critical examination of partnerships as units of analysis and leverage such analyses to offer strategies for gaining and mobilizing insights and enhancements, through practical frameworks for reflection, assessment, and intervention.

Contributions to this volume's concluding research section on International SLCE include an overview of service-learning's evolution in Vietnam from Dung Nguyen, Andrea Milligan, and Kathryn Sutherland and a qualitative examination of program experiences among faculty and students in community-based global learning immersion programs in Nicaragua and Florida, United States, by Leah Dunn, Diane Ceo-DiFrancesco, and Andrea Solis-Canto of Ohio's Xavier University. These and other articles connecting service-learning to global contexts are continuing to encourage our field to reexamine our definitions of "international" and inspect presumptions about framing the "local" in contrast to the "global" in our discourse. Our efforts to decenter our association from its historically North American roots and dominance depend upon continuing the projects to include and elevate voices and perspectives emerging globally.

We are grateful to IARSLCE's "Graduate Student Network" for encouraging members and promoting the opportunity to review books for the journal. This year's entries include a review of the 2023 edited volume, *Texteos clave de la extensión crítica latinoamericana y caribeña* (*Key Readings on Critical Community Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean*), emerging from the 2019–2022 Critical Community Engagement Working Group of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO). As an important Spanish-language contribution to the above-mentioned effort to ensure inclusion, we are grateful for this submission from Matias Flores and Paulette Dougnac and are certain the edited volume they introduce to us will be of interest to our readership. We similarly appreciate the review by Haden Botkin of the 2023 *Faculty Service-Learning Guidebook: Enacting Equity-Centered Teaching, Partnerships, and Scholarship*, by Cress, Stokamer, Van Cleave, and Kaufman.

This year's editorial leadership team experiences have led us to want to make note of several issues in continuing to advance the journal's priority to diversify and globalize voice and representation within our (virtual) pages. We will be considering ways to grow capacity to provide translated abstracts (perhaps inviting abstracts in native languages of authors for whom English is not their first language), and we similarly wish to continue the efforts we undertook these last few years to broaden participation in peer review and editorial processes, shaping and stewarding the submissions and content of the journal. We invite assistance and participation in the consideration of our approaches to "International" SLCE, and also to identifying, reviewing, and supporting global submissions—especially from authors for whom English is a secondary language. We are grateful to all those named in the Editorial Team and Peer Reviewers document, including the mentor reviewers who provided support to PSC authors. We offer special thanks to coeditors Susan Harris and Morgan Lewing and to our section editors, whose responsive and conscientious volunteer service to the peer review and editorial processes are no small gifts to the *IJRSLCE* as a high-quality, open-access academic journal.

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