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Transformed through Relationship: Faculty and Community Partners Give Voice to the Power of Partnerships

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Since the 1990s, hundreds of institutions of higher education have developed community-university partnerships through community-based learning initiatives in order to enhance student learning and strengthen our communities. These partnerships are often built upon ideals of reciprocity and synergy, yet there has been a dearth of rich qualitative assessment to describe the nature of these relationships, the roles played by all of the constituents in these relationships, and the impact that these relationships have on students, faculty, and community partners. This study engaged 10 faculty and their corresponding community partners to document their partnership practices and the impact of these practices on faculty, students, and community partners.

Portland State University (PSU) has developed one of the largest Capstone community-based learning programs in the nation, engaging more than 3,600 students in 240 Capstone courses annually. Acknowledged by numerous national awards and *U.S. News and World Report*, Portland State has become known as an exemplary model for community-based learning. Much of the institution's success in this regard comes from the powerful community partnerships that support student learning in these courses. Each Capstone course involves one faculty member, one community partner, and approximately 15 students. Capstone courses require students to engage actively in the community as they work in interdisciplinary teams to create a final product that is intended both to serve the community and to demonstrate student learning. These courses function as a community-based learning senior-level seminar in which students engage with assigned readings, complete regularly-scheduled written reflections, participate in bi-weekly class meetings, complete essays analyzing the root causes of the community issue at hand, engage in dialogues with guest speakers, and complete required community-based learning work equivalent to about 3 hours each week. Per the goals of the general education program (University Studies) in which the Capstone is imbedded, these courses are designed to enhance students' communication skills, critical thinking abilities, appreciation of the diversity of the human experience, and sense of social and ethical responsibility.

The purpose of this study was to document how faculty and community partners understand and articulate lessons learned around forming and maintaining community partnerships, as well as maximizing learning value for students, community partners, and faculty alike, including how the partnerships were formed, the roles played by each constituent in the partnership, the lived experience of a community-university partnership, and the impact of partnerships on students, partners, and faculty. The data collected in this study addressed those issues, and they also raised a theme that was unexpected by the researchers: that of transformation as a result of engaged community-university partnering. In this study, faculty and community partners spoke directly to the transformed states that they experienced as a result of participation in Capstone courses, and they also gave voice to the

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transformations they witnessed in students engaged in these partnerships.

Review of the Literature

Previously, various researchers have studied the impact of these community-based courses on students (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Buch & Harden, 2011; Haack, Kerrigan, & Reitenauer, 2009; Kerrigan, 2005; Kerrigan, Gelmon, & Spring, 2003), but they have less frequently assessed the impact of community partnerships on faculty and community partners. Over the last 15 years, the literature in the fields of community-based and service learning has slowly grown to document the benefits of community-university partnerships (Driscoll et al., 1998; Gelmon, Holland, Shinnamon, Connors & Seifer, 1998; Buys & Bersnall, 2007; Vernon & Ward, 1999). These benefits have included enhanced capacity for community partners to fulfill their missions, expanded ability for community partners to serve a greater number of clients, deepened value of the services offered to the community at large, heightened economic benefits, and the gaining of new insights about organizational operations. Other authors have explored the perspectives and experiences of the community partners in community-university partnerships in ways that have exposed the challenges in these endeavors (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Sandy, 2008; Creighton, 2008), including the time it takes to nurture partnerships and develop reciprocal relationships. This article adds to the literature by documenting the voices, perspectives, and insights of both faculty and community partners as they reflect on how the relationships they formed in the context of their community-university partnerships have transformed them and the students they engaged in service and learning. The qualitative data provided moves beyond showing the transactional benefits of partnering towards identifying the reciprocal nature of true partnerships and explores the ways that these relations actually transform the participants involved.

Data and Methods

This study involved in-depth interviews with 10 Capstone community partners and 10 Capstone faculty to discover the effects that Capstone partnerships have on community partners, faculty, and students, as well as to gain insight into the qualities and characteristics of exemplary partnership practices between post-secondary institutions and community organizations.

The authors recruited 15 randomly-selected Capstone courses for participation in the study. In order to recruit a randomized sample, the titles of all of the Capstone courses listed in the student bulletin were entered into an Excel file and then randomized within that program. The authors then wrote letters to the faculty member and corresponding community partner of the first 15 courses selected through randomized sampling, inviting them to participate in the study. This letter was followed up by a phone call to recruit the participants. The faculty and community members associated with each course were contacted in the order generated by the randomized listing. Out of the 15 randomly selected courses, ultimately 10 courses were included in the study, as this number of faculty-community partner duos agreed to complete individual in-depth interviews. There was no difference in the course pairings that chose to participate and those that declined, outside of their availability and agreement to participate. Both groups included Capstones from a variety of topical areas, including k-12 education, business, the environment, and a variety of social

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services. Those that declined reported that their schedules did not permit their participation. The researchers chose not to go back to recruit additional participants, because the data analysis showed that the themes were consistent within these 10 faculty-community partner pairings, thus saturating the themes.

Two researchers were engaged in separate analyses of the data so that themes could be confirmed and verified. The researchers employed Creswell's (1994) and Patton's (1990) protocols for data collection and coding and engaged in the process of data analysis as suggested by Creswell (1994). This process required the researchers first to read through all of the interview transcriptions carefully to get a sense of the whole and to note initial ideas about the data. Second, each researcher looked through the data one interview at a time and answered the question, "What is the underlying meaning of this interview?" Next, the researcher made a list of the core underlying topics and clustered similar ones into topical themes. Patton describes these initial stages of analysis as a process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data.

The researchers then tested these themes by looking at the data to see if they could be organized according to these themes. Patton (1990) defines this as a process of content analysis, in which topics are defined and labeled. After organizing the data, the researchers categorized the data accordingly and looked for relationships between the themes in order to make final decisions about the themes and their coding. The data were analyzed and recoded until a coherent and comprehensive thematic analysis had taken place. The two researchers compared and contrasted their thematic findings and confirmed the results.

Findings

After reading, analyzing, and coding more than a hundred pages of transcribed interviews with participants, the researchers confirmed that three themes emerged from the data related to the power of community partnerships:

1. Rich descriptions of partnerships as deeply relational
2. Clarification of roles played in partnerships
3. Reciprocal dynamic whereby faculty, students, and community partners are positively transformed through the process of partnering

Each of these themes is discussed below to demonstrate the insights shared by the participants.

Rich Descriptions of Partnerships as Deeply Relational

Each participant in this study described the partnership that s/he was involved in as being highly relational rather than merely transactional. When faculty and community partners were asked to describe their partnerships in a word or phrase, they used language such as "real," "earthy," "organic," "a dance," "good friends," "a positive learning experience," "a tandem," "progressive," "harmonious," "inspiring," "very stimulating," "incredibly rewarding," and "illuminating." One participant said that his community partnership is "a give-give; I always learn and they always learn."

Participants emphasized the relational aspects of their partnerships by telling stories of how they had worked together in various settings before the formal partnership between the agency and the PSU Capstone program began. Some reported that they had been col-

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leagues prior to the partnership through various public and private sector projects, while a few reported that they had initially been friends. Even when a faculty member and community partner were initially strangers who were then intentionally connected through a centralized coordinator at the University, they typically didn't mention that formalized introductory meeting; instead, they remembered the mutual work they were doing in the community and the fact that their common interest in the social and political issues embedded in the work connected them. Participants saw their partnerships as relational in a broad context more than as simply a pragmatic collaboration to complete a specific task. They described their work in terms of a common cause that bonded them, rather than a 10-week project to be completed.

Another component of the relational dimension of the partnerships involved shared values. Faculty and community partners did not seek or default to a transaction in which faculty were simply looking for placement sites, nor did the community partners only want tangible products from the efforts of University personnel. Rather, both sought out the partnership due to explicitly shared values. As one faculty member stated,

> I look for, and think that I have succeeded in finding, community partners that are structured similar[ly] to how I like to structure class. And that is a pretty democratic kind of environment...There's a real interdisciplinary approach to the staffing structure [in my community partner's organization], and I think that that's key for students to witness…[T]here's this sense of this collective wisdom of how they work with the folks that they work with and how they try to lobby within the city and county around issues connected to homelessness. It's a real grassroots approach, and I think that that is a way that I approach the class, because even though it might be the same course, term to term to term, or a very similar syllabus term to term to term, I never know the collection of human beings I'm going to get, so that sense of it being an organic process each time [is something] the community partner support[s] and…run[s] parallel to.

Clarification of Roles Played in Partnerships

The next theme that emerged from the interviews was a clear statement of the roles that faculty and community partners played in their partnerships. Faculty and community partners described several important roles that community partners accomplished in the collaborations. A constant theme with both faculty and community partners was the notion of the community partner serving as essential "bookends" that held the community-based Capstone together. Community partners were often described as entering the Capstone in the first week of the term and providing the orientation to the community issue being addressed, the demographic affected by the community issue, the agency itself, the logistics of the partnership, and relevant legal issues. As one partner described it,

> [w]e came over and did quite a bit of training of [the] Capstone students, providing them with information about Somalia and Somali culture [and] cultural sensitivity issues…I would go over in the beginning and introduce myself as a supervisor and help the facilitator do the application forms, security checks, etc. I was very active in the beginning [of the course].

Community partners were described as taking the lead in introducing the community need being addressed in the Capstone and serving as the expert on sociopolitical issues such as

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homelessness, at-risk youth, immigrant and refugee resettlement, community planning, science education, and the political mobilization of citizens. Community partners were seen as grounding the course in the "real issues" of the community and providing "real-world examples."

The second aspect to being a "bookend" was community partners' providing closure to the course in the last week of the term. Community partners came onto campus to witness students' presentations of their findings from the course and to listen to students' final reflections on their experiences. The community partners were able to reflect back to students their own observations about the students' gifts, strengths, challenges, and weaknesses. They offered crucial feedback on the impact that students had made in the 10 weeks of the course and suggested ways that students could continue to be effective change agents in their community.

Both faculty and community partners described that part of the significance of the community partner's role as "bookend" was providing a real-world, professional audience for students' findings in community-based research projects. As one community partner remarked,

> I think knowing that there was somebody back here who had a job and was waiting for these people to give them the results…gave students a little more motivation…[r]ather than just [the faculty member] saying "We're going to go do this, [but] nobody's going to know about it." Because, at the final presentation, we had a good 10 to 12 city and regional staff there listening, and I think that helps motivate students.

This notion of the importance of the "bookends" was repeated throughout the interviews as a normative practice that helped students enter and exit communities with a sense of integrity and meaning.

Another theme that ran throughout the interviews was the critical role of the community partner in the training and supervision of students. There was constant mention that community partners provided the grounding necessary to prepare students for work in the community. This included offering themselves as guest lecturers, hosting community and agency tours, initiating formal training programs, providing introductory curriculum to sociopolitical issues, framing the "big picture," and maintaining the critical oversight needed "on the ground" at the community partner site. Faculty and community partners described the supervisory roles teachers modeled in public science programs and public and private school classrooms, counselors provided in schools, and staff played at various non-profits. As one faculty stated, "What the students do is volunteer each week with [our community partner, which] plays a huge role. [The community partner does] 90% of training students and overseeing them during their project, which is the time out in the field mentoring kids." Faculty and community partners described this supervision as an essential component that made the various partnerships work. Without it, students would not achieve anywhere near the depth of learning which typically takes place in Capstone courses. This was especially true when students interacted with populations they had never encountered before, such as street youth and resettled refugees. Faculty described the expertise of the staff who helped students orient to and engage in new communities as invaluable. Faculty and community partners both reported that the community partners served as co-educators in the course and commented on the expertise they brought to the course.

Another role community partners played was in offering a relatively safe space for

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students to engage with new populations in a real-world setting. Faculty acknowledged that a key aspect of their learning objectives was for students to learn about people who are "different" from them: older, younger, and of diverse social locations with regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, sexual and gender orientation, and ability. As one faculty member who engaged students at a day shelter with economically marginalized persons stated,

> I really try to emphasize that their time is both sort of doing something and [just] be-ing there. … the idea of [our community partner] is to help them build relationships in large part with persons who are different from them so that they…realize the great similarities between [them].

Exposing students to various populations was understood as a key aspect of the partner-ships, and one that higher education could not perform without the collaboration with a community partner.

Finally, in 30% of the courses studied, the community partner reported playing a key role in developing the learning objectives and overall curriculum of the course. As one partner stated, "We all got together and really did quite a bit work of putting this together, designing the goals, the objectives, the curriculum." In the remaining courses, the faculty member was understood to be in charge of the course curriculum, structure, goals, sylla-bus, and grading criteria. Frequently faculty commented that they sought the community partner's feedback but retained control of the academic course content and structure in the classroom. As one faculty member described,

> I think that I…set things up the way it made most sense to me and sent that design off to [the community partner] and they said "That looks good to us," and they signed off on it, and they have continual small suggestions for tweaks here and there.

Reciprocal dynamic whereby faculty, students, and community partners are positively transformed through the process of partnering.

All three constituencies in Capstone courses reported positive transformations as a re-sult of their participation in these service-learning environments. The sections that follow expand on how this transformation was experienced by each group.

Community Partners Report Impact and Transformation: "They Make Our Pro-gram Possible." Faculty and community partners not only consistently communicated the remarkable level of high-quality work produced by the students, but they also articulated the ways in which campus-community partnerships impacted and transformed community agencies. One of the primary impacts was to increase the capacity of the community or-ganization to reach or extend its mission in the community. Most of the time, community partners and faculty referred to increased capacity in terms of the day-to-day ability of the partnering organization to serve a larger number of clients through its collaboration with the Capstone. Occasionally community partners indicated that this increased capacity in-cluded their ability to leverage their partnership to access greater grant and other funding. One community partner stated that the campus-community partnership was "an important underpinning of the various grants" they were seeking. Community partners such as those quoted below commented that this theme of increased capacity was vital to their organi-zations. They reported that the engagement of college students had a tremendous impact

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on their programs and even stated that their programs would not be possible without the participation of PSU Capstone students:

[T]hey make our program possible. I would have to say they are hugely instrumental in making…the youth program work every year, especially the summer program. I don't think we could do the summer program without them. We would have to recruit new tutors, but the students are so well-trained [since the faculty member] talks to them a lot about culture, a lot about Somalis, about the refugee experience, so they come in very well-trained in terms of culture [sic] awareness…so when they work under the [guidance] of an ESL teacher it works really well. In the summer program, since we emphasize a lot of recreational activities, it works very well there too.

They're making a…significant difference. A lot of the classroom follow-up that they do with the younger students and with the teachers would be impossible for us to do otherwise because we have a very limited staff, so they're keeping that connection, that continuity, between the teachers and the students and [the organization]. [T]hey're out there representing [the organization] and doing things that we would not be able to do otherwise.

It was clear from the interviews that this issue of capacity is critical for community partners, and the University must understand and appreciate the ramifications to community partners when course adjustments are prompted by the University. For example, if a course has low enrollment or gets cancelled for one term (or indefinitely), the University often leaves the community partner with a huge gap in service provision. A faculty member described this issue of capacity and the vulnerability of community programs if the University is unable to or chooses not to continue projects with the same level of student participation:

[PSU students] are a huge part of the program. Last quarter, for example, for some… reason my Capstone was very under-enrolled, and that made the programs much more difficult to deliver. The students are the most stable base of volunteers that [the organization] has, so the number of contact hours with students is much higher for my 16 PSU volunteers than it is for the other 200-some-odd volunteers. They are a huge part of our program.

Given the profound nature of this issue for community partners, universities need to anticipate the impact of any changes in course offerings and develop effective plans to reduce the negative impact on community partners.

In addition to expanding the capacity of community programs, participants discussed how partnerships transformed individuals and organizations. These transformations were articulated as individuals gained new insights about their organization, deepened their own understanding of the work they do, and enhanced their ability to communicate their work to others. One Creative Marketing Capstone partnered with a community organization that serves street youth. Here is how the faculty member described the impact her students had in that collaboration:

When the students did their presentation, the community partner brought a member from their Board, so it was the executive director…the director of marketing…and a Board member who [sic] we had never met before. [A]fter the presentation, [they said] "Oh, you guys understood us in a way no one else did," [and] the Board member said

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something to the effect of 'This helps us think about how we think about ourselves." It's like they hadn't really fully understood what they were about [before]. That's what branding is really all about. They call it "making a spirit identity," which is to figure out what is the spirit of your organization, because that is what you are trying to communicate. So…they said that that had really gelled for them through this process, that they're not [just] an organization that creates all these different programs to help street kids. What they're about, my students came up with…[is] "amazing transformations." They make transformations in these kids' lives…that are…amazing in getting them to have a new life. So when we went to their annual awards ceremony, and [what] we talked about afterwards was that you could see that the research that the students did, [the agency] wove it into their presentation. They started talking about themselves and they acknowledged this in the presentation. They said "You know we have this group [of Capstone students] and they…did this work and…helped us to see that we are in the business of amazing transformation." You can see that the work that the students did really affected how the organization thought about itself, not just in communicating outwardly to their target audience, to those that they want to give them money, but also how they communicated with their volunteers in a way that helped them to understand what their mission was in an elevator-speech kind of way. "We're about amazing transformations. That's what our job is. And that is what we are doing for these kids."

Community partners consistently mentioned that one of the positive impacts of engaging in campus-community partnerships was greater visibility and awareness of their programs. They appreciated the number of college students that truly came to understand their organizations, programs, and clients in deep and meaningful ways, and they experienced these college volunteers telling friends and family members about their programs. As a result, they believed that the community-at-large had a much better sense of the work that their organizations do in ways those persons had not had prior to the partnership. A comment made by a community partner represented this theme that we saw throughout the data:

I think on a more general level it gives us a lot of awareness within the community. We get 24 Capstone students each school year, and multiply that over the number of years [we've been partnering]… [N]ot only do they themselves become aware of what we're doing with schools, but a lot of times the Capstone students the following quarter will say "I took this class because my friend was in it and they said how wonderful it was." It really does bring a lot of awareness to us…in general.

The final impact on community partners documented in the data was that college students served as role models to clients of the agencies. This was particularly true when the partnership served k-12 students and other youth. There was agreement that at-risk youth had few role models who presented college as a viable option for them. Community partners were passionate that this impact was an important one for higher education to understand and embrace. As one k-12 teacher remarked,

[The Capstone students are] making a huge difference. They're making the goal of attending a university…seem real, seem realistic to our students, many of whom will probably be the first students in their family to even graduate from high school. So when the PSU students come in and relate really well with our students and create

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these really good interactive lesson plans, then the students identify with these college students. That's huge. That might be one of the only college students these people have ever met. So it's a huge impact.

Students Report Impact and Transformation: "I See Rain Differently Now." Faculty and community partners were clear that this positive impact was not a one-way street whereby the University simply served the community, but rather a dynamic relationship that positively impacted student learning as well. They framed these learnings not only as reciprocal, but also as transformational. Faculty and community partners documented that students learned a tremendous amount about diverse communities, real-world social and political issues, career development, and their own interests, efficacies, strengths, and weaknesses, which transformed the lives of their students..

Faculty and community partners spoke passionately about student learning in the area of diversity and how students broke down barriers caused by previously unexamined stereotypes. One faculty member described the transformational power of partnerships on students' perception of homelessness and homeless people:

[B]ased on the informal feedback…[and] also on the evaluations, [the students] said that it really changed the way they looked at street kids and the problem of homelessness. The majority of them came in thinking that these kids just chose to be on the streets; it was just a choice. They didn't understand all of the factors that lead people to go onto the streets and really how awful it is to live on the streets and why the kids behave the way that they [do]. I…give them a psychological understanding and also a social understanding of those aspects…[A] lot of them said that it just really changed their stereotypes, and also a lot of them noted how they will look at these kids—they will actually acknowledge their existence [now]. Typically, when you run across street kids, you want to avoid them and to avoid eye contact and you don't want them to harass you…[J]ust acknowledging their humanity—they learned that was extremely important. That was something…I heard over and over again that they hadn't really thought about before.

Community partners also commented on how students were transformed through the partnership as expressed by a deeper appreciation of human diversity.

I think they've learned about a culture that they would never have known about before. I think that they come out of it…quite transformed…where people who have never ever met anybody from [other] cultures…[have] this one-on-one relationship and it really opens their eyes. They are Muslim kids for one thing, they've been in refugee camps, [and the Capstone students] find that these children are not helpless victims, they are kids and they need…help. [The Capstone students] learn a lot from the children about their religion. I've never really had a group of Capstone students who didn't have a strong impact from working in this.

Another faculty member who is also partnering with agencies that serve the homeless community commented on the impact of Capstone community partnerships on deepening students' appreciation of the human experience and catalyzing a far greater capacity to empathize with populations never engaged with before. She articulated one student's growth this way:

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[Our community partner] is serving an entire population of people that…many students…had no familiarity with… [I]n some cases, students will say "You know I didn't even know this situation existed for this many people." And I think that [the] impact…is somewhat mysterious [in] how that ripples out…[L]ast term a student said something that has stayed with me…[I]t was raining a lot, and maybe on the third or fourth class…we were doing…a check-in about how our experiences were going at [our placement sites]…[My student] said, as he was sort of staring off into space, "As a result of being at [my placement], I see rain differently now." You know, in a city where it rains for many months out of the year, I thought that that was a really profound thing to say…[H]e was well aware that rain for him means that he gets to school and his sneakers are soggy a little bit or he has to place his jacket over the back of his chair so it can air out a little bit, but rain for many of the folks that he works with every day is a much larger and more grand issue.

In addition to an enhancement of students' appreciation of diversity, the data showed that faculty and community partners witnessed students' developing a sense of efficacy that they could positively influence social issues. One faculty member reported,

Typically what I see at PSU is students say[ing] "Well, I can't make a difference" and "Individuals can't really make a difference," and [my] students were noting that "Wow, this was something that shifted for me, I feel like I really can make a difference on some level." And just to see that shift for me is really gratifying, to see people feel really empowered and to see that the tool that they didn't really consider, and that they weren't necessarily an expert in, they could use it to empower themselves and others.

Faculty-Reported Transformations: "It Isn't Simply Academic"

Faculty members who engaged in these partnerships reported that this engagement had positive transformations for them as well. They discussed how their community partnerships changed their teaching methods, expanded their "skill sets", raised their morale, renewed their passion for teaching, and helped them see the connections throughout the University's four-year general education curriculum and between general education and students' disciplinary studies.

In one example, a faculty member reported being changed by watching the way his community partner taught k-12 students. Based on his observations of his partner, he expanded his teaching methods by incorporating more active and reflective pedagogies into his own classroom practice. This faculty member reported,

I think that act of reviewing the day's events and figuring out what went wrong and figuring out why things went right has made a huge impact on the way I deal with kids and how I am as a mentor. Just being out in the field and seeing [the community partner's] particular teaching style in action has completely changed the way I teach. The other class that I teach is an academic course on electron microscopy, and I run it like a [Capstone] class now.

That same faculty added,

It's definitely affected…the way that I'm perceived…I…have a different skillset than when I started. I started off as an electron microscopist and material scientist and now

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I'm also somebody who's seen as having skills with working with educators and doing education and…science outreach. It's broadened my skillset considerably…[I]n [my academic] department, when people are thinking about doing some sort of outreach, they'll often come to me now, because this is something I'm seen as being successful at.

Faculty consistently reported that teaching community-based Capstones renewed their morale as they worked with students who were able to apply knowledge to pressing social and political issues. Capstone partnerships helped make their teaching more relevant and rewarding. Faculty witnessed the difference students were making in the community through their courses and reported that it brought them out of ruts, helped prevent them from getting mired in the politics of the University, and rejuvenated their careers. One faculty member who had been teaching primarily first-year students reflected on the impact of teaching a community-based Capstone:

I think the biggest thing is morale. When you teach primarily [first-year students], as I have been doing, or even [s]ophomore[s]…you sort of question sometimes [if] this [is] worth doing…I've seen the [first-year] students achieving the [general education] goals and I believe [in] the goals, but once [I] hit the Capstones I [saw] a lot of the students going "Oh, I see this goal really applying in the real world." It [isn't simply] academic, it becomes really, really real…[Y]ou have to get a lot of intrinsic value out of teaching in order to feel rewarded…because we don't get rewarded a lot of other ways. I think Capstone [has been] something really very important in making me happier despite all the [departmental politics] that's going around…I can [say that] my students are doing great; they are making a huge difference… [W]hen I go back into my [first-year] course, I can developmentally see a difference, but I know that [my first-year students] can get to this point where my seniors are.

Discussion

As increasing numbers of institutions of higher education explore ways to be responsive to the needs in their communities, it is imperative that both administrative and instructional staff involved in the development and implementation of community-based and service learning deepen both their understanding of what "community partnership" truly means and their practices in forming these partnerships. For the authors of this article—the director of a senior-level service-learning Capstone program and a longtime instructor of these courses/faculty development specialist—exploring the "beating heart" of successful partnerships has required going beyond identifying the nuts-and-bolts tasks that must ground any service-learning endeavor to discover the deeper, richer story that often goes unexpressed. This study has been a step towards that thicker description of what actually happens in partnerships, how it happens, and why it matters.

Throughout the interviews, there was a palpable sense of delight and surprise expressed by interviewees at the discoveries made by all of the constituents in these courses. It is striking to note how thoroughly the participants in this study used the language of "relationship" in talking about their partnerships. Community partners often talked about "their" students, much as a faculty person does, and clearly evinced a sense of genuine connection with the students. They framed these relationships as transformational, rather than transactional. Community partners and faculty both described the work as having an

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intimacy of a dance rather than being a checklist of tasks. They identified this work as reciprocal—and, more than that, they reported that it changed them and their students and the ways they understood their work. With every faculty member and community contact interviewed, a clear and compelling narrative emerged, which described the transformational aspect of partnerships as this engagement deepened and expanded the work of faculty, community partners, and students.

Community partners and faculty articulated the powerful role of community partners as co-educators to the college students. They provided essential elements of course design, including orienting students to community issues, safely engaging students in the community, providing the supervision and feedback to assist students in the community, and deepening and expanding the content of the course through guest lectures. Community partners found not only reciprocity but transformation from engaging in this work. They gained new insights about themselves and their work as a result of partnerships. Faculty echoed the powerful transformative effect of partnerships and reported that it deepened their work, raised their morale, and enhanced student learning.

Both faculty and community partners articulated their experiences of Capstone courses as being learning opportunities for all involved. Faculty spoke about their own evolving skillsets and the ways in which they were perceived by colleagues as increasingly capable with regard to interactive pedagogies and community outreach; they also recognized the morale boost they experienced in working with upper-division students whose efforts mattered not only in the context of the learning of course material but also to collaborating organizations and persons in our shared communities. The faculty interviewed for this study clearly understood themselves as having been enriched by their engagement in the Capstone, and they saw that this enrichment allowed them to participate in the University in ways that brought benefit to the campus community, too.

While community partners reported receiving many benefits from the concrete actions of students and the impacts of those actions on those they served, they further identified that they understood themselves in new and enhanced ways as a result of their engagement with the Capstone. This reflexive organizational learning is a less tangible but perhaps equally valuable aspect of the long-term impact that Capstone faculty and students have on the organizations with which they partner, as those organizations continue both to draw on the awarenesses they glean from their Capstone involvement and to use the collaboratively-developed products.

Among questions raised for the authors as a result of this study are the following: How might we understand the particular orientation to the work of partnering that characterizes the most effective faculty and community partner pairings? What personal, interpersonal, organizational, and institutional qualities, in what sorts of combinations, yield the most promising and meaningful partnerships? How might we investigate and name these features, such that the limited resources of all constituents might get tapped most effectively, not only in terms of material costs and benefits to community partners, faculty, and students, but with regard to the ineffable qualities of transformation, too?

The results of this study suggest that constituents in a community-based learning setting experience meaning, and even transformation, when relationship grounds the endeavor—genuine, reciprocal relationship, such that all parties experience a "learning in all directions" that comes from, as Parker Palmer (1998) calls it, a "live encounter" with course materials and with other human beings working together with common purpose.

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The relational nature of the method utilized in this study, which involved conducting separate interviews with faculty-community partner pairs, provided a sort of mirror to the interactive nature of the courses under review. A final question, then, emerges from this study: How might practitioners in these fields design and deploy uniquely relational research methods that can capture additionally nuanced expressions of how faculty, students, and community partners meaningfully join in common purpose as they negotiate difference in their collaborative work?

In this time of economic crises facing both higher education and community organizations; heightened discussions around how to create curricular efficiencies in our post-secondary institutions; and the reality in our communities of large reductions in revenues for essential educational, health, and human services, partnerships will likely become essential to the health and well-being of our communities. Institutions of all sorts will be called upon to share their resources for the common good. This research shows evidence that expansion of partnerships between post-secondary institutions and community organizations has the potential to positively transform all participants and make learning more relevant for students while preparing them to be effective participants in our diverse communities.

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