Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, & Scholarship - Loyola University Chicago
Conceptual Framework for Community Partnership Report – 1/8/2020

Background:

The Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, & Scholarship (CELTS) has been partnering with local and Chicago area organizations (for profit, government, and non-profit) for twelve years to provide community-based learning opportunities for undergraduate students. Through these partnerships, over 1000 organizations have worked with faculty and students providing opportunities either within the realm of service learning, academic internships, and/or community-based research. The CELTS also provides these organizations campus-based professional development opportunities through annual workshops, networking, and career fairs to enhance relationship-building and knowledge sharing. Because of the plethora of relationships that established over the years, the CELTS has developed a conceptual framework of how it approaches community partnerships.

Process:

In early 2019, the CELTS launched a pilot assessment of 14 community partnerships, using a modified version of the Transformational Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison, 2010). The pilot organizations were chosen based on diversity of the partnership across a variety of factors, including organizational size and focus, and perceived breadth, depth, and duration of the partnership. Using internal student placement data and institutional knowledge, we identified community organization staff and Loyola faculty and staff who were engaged in the partnership to complete the TRES.

The results from this pilot assessment made two facts clear: Loyola faculty were less engaged than we hoped with the community organizations where their students were serving or interning, and individuals from both Loyola and community partners viewed the partnerships as more transactional than we anticipated. These results led to conversations with peers at other institutions as well as within the CELTS that we needed to articulate how we viewed and valued community partnerships. After conducting a literature review in summer 2019, we drafted this conceptual framework. To gain external feedback, we had Service-Learning Community of Practice faculty as well as our Community Partner Advisory Board review the conceptual framework. Their comments were incorporated into this final version.

Conceptual Framework:

The CELTS's Conceptual Framework for Partnership contains three foundational aspects: multifaceted connections, critical components, and the Continuum of Engagement in the Community. Taken together, these three aspects lay out the basics for what we strive for in all of our community partnerships.

Multifaceted Connections:

Community partnerships involve several different entities and a host of various individuals. While we as CELTS staff may have direct relationships with community organizations, those organizations and their staff also have direct relationships with the Loyola students engaged there, as well as with the faculty teaching those students. Similarly, the CELTS has connections with faculty and with students in the context of these community partnerships. These relationships may be made through an existing connection (e.g., CELTS staff introduces faculty to community partner) and these relationships may have a significant amount of overlap (e.g., student only interacts with community organization via project(s) for faculty member's class), but they are all still independent connections that need to be recognized as such. They also need to be recognized as two-way relationships, where each party acts on and impacts the other.

Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) created an excellent foundation for this effort with their SOFAR framework, differentiating Students, Community Organizations, Faculty, Administrators, and Community Residents, and highlighting the distinct, dyadic, and two-way relationships between each of those entities. The CELTS has modified their framework to be more specifically relevant to our work. We have consolidated Community Organizations and Community Residents into Community Partners, matching the typical language used by the CELTS and recognizing that our work with the community is always done through organizations, and any work with any individual residents is only done in the context of the individual's work with an organization. We have also replaced administrators with the CELTS, recognizing that we serve that role in this context. Finally, we have changed "faculty" to "faculty/staff," honoring the fact that while the CELTS is a curriculum center whose primary focus is on curricular engagement, there is a significant amount of non-curricular engagement happening within these partnerships, such as volunteer service or professional development opportunities.

Critical Components:

There are a number of characteristics we find to be necessary in these separate interactions and exchanges that comprise a partnership. We have labeled these "critical components" and separated them by when in the partnership they are most critical (although many are present at multiple stages) — in the preparation stages, throughout the partnership, or as an outcome of the partnership.

In the preparation stages of a partnership, there are three critical components: complementary vision, goals, and expectations; mutual benefit; and respect for all parties. We recognize that the various entities in each partnership approach the work from different perspectives with different priorities and seeking different outcomes. However, there is great potential in any partnership as long as all parties can recognize those differences, respect each other and each other's priorities, and work to achieve them in a way that benefits everyone.

Throughout the entirety of the partnership, we look for resources, risk, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, voice, reflection and critical dialogue, space for disagreement, teaching and learning, and cocreation of knowledge. Resources and risk are important because with no resources (whether they be financial, human, material, or other), the work cannot get off the ground, and with no risk taken, there is reduced commitment to continue the partnership when barriers are encountered. Diversity and inclusion, accessibility, and voice are similar and tie into the component of respect for all parties. If partnerships are not diverse, inclusive, and accessible, or if certain parties are not given a voice in the partnership, the partnership will suffer. The CELTS is firmly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all forms throughout our work, including our community partnerships. Those voices contribute to reflection and critical dialogue and space for disagreement. As an Ignatian institution, reflection and critical dialogue lie at the heart of our work. We look to all parties in a partnership to consider thoughtfully the work being done and examine its strengths and weaknesses in order to work effectively and efficiently. This will often lead to disagreement, and making space for that is a healthy aspect of partnership. As a result of this reflection, we hope for teaching and learning to happen throughout the partnership. This teaching and learning goes in every direction. We value immensely the role our community partners play as co-educators in addition to the educating done by our faculty/staff, and we also recognize that we all have much to learn from our students. This broad teaching and learning hopefully results in the cocreation of new knowledge by all participants in the partnership.

Lastly, we look for five outcomes as a result of partnerships: assessment, feedback, dissemination of knowledge, reflection and critical dialogue, and reciprocity. In order to maximize the time and effort put into a partnership, we must assess the work being done, share our personal experiences with all parties, spread the knowledge we gained through the process. This applies both within the partnership and beyond. We encourage faculty, staff, and students to share their experiences with their community partners, with their peers, and with the broader community. We invite community partners to share their experiences with us, with our faculty, staff, and students, and with their broader community as well, and we work to find ways to make that happen. We also seek ongoing reflection and critical dialogue—it is not just a part of the process, but it should be an outcome as well, where all parties think critically about the partnership. Finally, similar to how mutual benefit is a component of preparation for partnerships, we view reciprocity as a critical outcome, especially in the context of capacity building for all parties. Although partnerships may change significantly from the initial preparation, there should still be an element of reciprocity where all parties gain from having worked with each other.

Continuum of Engagement in the Community:

Building on Furco's cone of engagement (as referenced by Janke, 2013), Jameson, Clayton, and Jaeger's (2010) thick and thin reciprocity, and Janke's (2013) Cone of Reciprocity, the final foundational aspect of our framework is the Continuum of Engagement in the Community. This continuum represents the different types and levels of engagement that happen throughout any

community partnership. At one end of the continuum lies "Outreach To." Either this outreach can originate from the community partner reaching out to someone at Loyola for partnership, or it can be come from an individual (faculty, student, or staff) at the University reaching out to a community partner. This type of engagement is "thinner" and often transactional, with entities looking to meet a need in a simplified manner. A common example of this type of engagement would be a community partner looking for students for a general volunteer role, or Loyola seeking an opportunity for students to engage in the community relatively quickly and with low barriers to entry. At the opposite end of the continuum lies "Engagement With." This more-collaborative, "thicker" partnership is likely to incorporate increased communication, a shared planning process, and increased cocreation of knowledge. Compared to the often-transactional nature of the "Outreach To" end of the continuum, these interactions are more transformative. Examples include ongoing, multi-semester projects and community partners co-instructing courses with Loyola faculty or staff. Of course, between these two ends of the continuum lies immense middle ground, with different levels and types of engagement.

It is important to note that there is value across the entire continuum. As long as the critical components of partnership are present, the CELTS sees value in any community partnership. There are times when transactional engagement works best for all parties, and there are times that call for deeper levels of engagement. These partnerships will also change regularly, so a partnership that adheres more towards the "Engagement With" end of the continuum one semester may shift more towards "Outreach To" down the road as projects wrap up, priorities change, or turnover of individuals shifts the dynamics of the partnership.

Finally, these different levels of engagement can exist concurrently within the same partnership. For example, at a single point in time, a community partner may be co-teaching a service-learning course and hosting those students completing the service, employing multiple academic interns, and seeking one-time volunteer assistance for an event. Viewing these three different interactions together shows a partnership that exists at multiple points along the continuum at the same time. We see the Continuum of Engagement in the Community as a tool to recognize that our partnerships are varied, multi-faceted, and fluid, but that there is always value in them.

Areas for Further Study

As with any development of a conceptual framework, there are questions raised for further discussion:

1. How will CELTS gather information about departmental engagement with a community partner?
2. Where and how is community engagement rewarded in the tenure and promotion process?

3. How can CELTS and other campus partners (i.e. Office of Civic Engagement) assess the community's perceptions of the university's engagement and impact on the community?(This could be helpful for the St. Ignatius Parish strategic team).
4. How does this work inform placed based community engagement to develop interpersonal experiences?
5. Will this framework be utilized across the University?

References & Influences

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