Original Research

A Framework for Justice-Centering Relationships: Implications for Place-Based Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract

Community engagement in higher education has been promoted as critical to fulfilling higher education's responsibility to the public good through teaching, learning, and knowledge generation. Reciprocity and mutual benefit are key principles of community engagement that connote a two-way exchange of knowledge and outcomes. However, it is not clear from existing literature whether community engagement positively impacts communities. This paper presents findings from a dissertation study focused on how campus-community partnership stakeholders define impact and discusses implications for place-based pedagogy. Using grounded theory, the ways community and campus partners defined community impact in a diverse set of campus-community partnerships at two U.S. urban, Jesuit universities that employ a place-based approach to community engagement were explored. Relationships as facilitators of impact and as impacts in and of themselves emerged as central themes that led to the development of the Justice-Centering Relationships Framework. The framework includes two paradigms for understanding community impact in higher education community engagement – Plug-and-Play and Justice-Centering Relationships – that are bridged by a reframing process. The framework contributes to and informs the "how" of taking a place-based community engagement approach that leads to positive benefits for community impact, student learning, and institutional change.

Keywords: community engagement, community impact, campus-community partnerships, community-engaged learning, community-engaged research, pedagogy, higher education

Introduction

Community engagement is "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities… for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015, p. 2). Community partners are valued as co-educators, co-researchers, and co-constructors of knowledge. Institutions benefit from improved town-gown relations; faculty benefit from enhanced teaching and research opportunities; and students benefit from opportunities to apply knowledge and skills to real-world challenges (Eyler et al., 2001).

While there are volumes of research on the benefits of community engagement to higher education, particularly student learning, and development, there is little empirical research documenting benefits to communities (Butin, 2003; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Rubin, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker et al., 2009; Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Most community impact research focuses on group dynamics or the partnering process (Sandoval et al., 2012; Wallerstein et al., 2011). Research on the partnership unit and relational dynamics have led to critical insights about promising practices but have fallen short of making a connection to community impact.

The challenges that community partners and higher education practitioners experience in pursuing positive community impact are rooted in an epistemological problem, originating with the dominant epistemology in higher education that privileges university expertise. This expert paradigm places a higher value on academic knowledge over community-based knowledge. It reflects a one-way flow of knowledge "from inside the boundaries of the university outward to its place of need" (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 8). Within this paradigm, community knowledge is not valued as an asset for constructing new knowledge. Thus the values of collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual benefit are not prioritized or embedded within the culture, policies, and practices of higher education, including pedagogy. Further, a lack of appreciation for the knowledge assets in the community contributes to only focusing on the faculty's knowledge expertise and the way it is translated into learning outcomes for students, making the outcomes of community engagement predominantly about students.

The dominance of the expert model has contributed to a historical relationship between higher education and communities that has been largely exploitive, with colleges and universities using communities to extract knowledge for the benefit of research and teaching rather than co-constructing knowledge for the benefit of higher education and community well-being (Stoecker, 2016; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Further, it can be argued that an expert epistemology also short-changes student learning. In a 2017 lecture, Nadinne Cruz asked, "to prepare students to be capable of solving urgent social problems, is what we teach them up to the task?" Ultimately, Cruz argued that if we continue to see the university as the center or only source of knowledge,

we are not providing an education that prepares students to address the wicked problems impacting communities today. Rather than view the university as the center and/or the entirety of knowledge, Cruz argued that we need to claim the whole circle of knowledge by recognizing diverse ways of knowing that include community contributions, as well as the knowledge and experiences the students bring to their courses. This requires a fundamental redesign of the pedagogical approach. Changing the relationship between campus and community will require new epistemologies that value the knowledge assets of the community and lead to a better alignment and integration of the central role of higher education – the generation and dissemination of knowledge – with community outcomes (Saltmarsh et al., 2009).

The problem the dissertation study aimed to address was how campus-community partnership stakeholders define impact (Author, 2021). To achieve the democratic aims of the community engagement movement and contribute to the public good, a shift in epistemology is needed, and voices that have been traditionally excluded will need to be engaged in defining and co-constructing a shared vision for change. Thus, this grounded theory study aimed to explore how campus-community partnership stakeholders (university faculty, staff, and community partners) defined, measured, and understood community impact in a diverse set of community-campus partnership initiatives at two U.S. urban Jesuit Universities. Both universities participating in this study have earned the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification and employ place-based approaches to community engagement.

Place-Based Community Engagement (PBCE) focuses on community-campus engagement efforts within a specific geographic area, places equal importance on campus and community impact, is driven by community-identified needs, and seeks to engage the entire campus (Yamamura & Koth, 2018). Although this study was not explicitly focused on pedagogy, it does have implications for teaching and learning as it draws direct connections between community impact and student learning. Current research on academic community engagement calls for a recentering to focus on community impact (Green et al., 2021). Findings from this study and the resulting framework can help guide and facilitate the recentering called for by Green et al. by situating community impact as the starting point for the design of place-based pedagogy.

The guiding research questions for this study included: 1) how do campus-community partnership stakeholders define impact and what types/forms of impact do they value; and 2) in what ways do the similarities and differences between how campus and community partners define, measure, and understand impact contribute to our theoretical understanding of how campus-community engagement activities can be designed to achieve positive community benefit?

The Justice-Centering Relationship Framework created through this study includes two paradigms for understanding community impact in higher education community engagement –

Plug-and-Play and Justice-Centering Relationships – that are bridged by a reframing process. Data from this study pointed to the interrelatedness of community impact and student learning outcomes and the potential for enhancing both through pedagogical practices that center community impact and a broader organizational posture that values and centers relationships with the community.

Sensitizing Concepts: Elements of a Conceptual Framework

A review of the literature on community impact led to the identification of three sensitizing concepts: 1) campus-community partnership structures and processes, 2) epistemology, and 3) power. These broad concepts informed the research design and data analysis. Sensitizing concepts are broad notions drawn from disciplinary perspectives, prior research, and practical experiences that serve as starting points for inquiry and "give researchers initial but tentative ideas to pursue" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 30). They can be larger units of analysis that help contextualize research, inform and shape research questions, and analyze and organize data (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

Campus-Community Partnership Structures and Processes

Extensive research has informed a set of promising practices related to campus-community partnerships that include shared vision among partners, mutual benefit, trusting relationships, a shared process for decision-making, a focus on assets and strengths as well as needs, and practice of evaluation and assessment (CCPH, 1998; Jacoby, 2003; Ramaley, 2000; Torres & Schaffer, 2000). Additional research identifies partnership theories and typologies that distinguish between technocratic partnerships focused on exchanging goods and transformative partnerships characterized by shared power and institutional change (Enos & Morton, 2003; Jameson et al., 2011). An underlying assumption of the study was that positive outcomes would not be achieved without intentional, evidenced-based practices in campus-community relations, which informed the research design and participant selection. PBCE is built on these evidence-based practices and attempts to expand the growing edges with its specific geographical focus, emphasis on broad institutional engagement, intentional centering of community impact, and long-term vision (Yakamura & Koth, 2018).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and what qualifies as or is justified as knowledge. The norms and traditions of higher education privilege an expert epistemology – the idea that all of the knowledge, resources, and expertise emanates from the academy. This is problematic for community engagement because the expert epistemology does not value community knowledge,

leading to the prioritization of higher education benefits over community benefits. This can lead to the exploitation of communities rather than the betterment of communities. Ironically, as Cruz (2017) asserts, the exclusion of community knowledge limits student learning by not exposing them to the whole circle of knowledge.

The dominance of the expert paradigm in higher education community engagement leads to epistemic injustice, defined by Catala (2015) as "a type of injustice that an individual suffers specifically in her capacity as a knower, as a result of her unequal social position" (p. 426). In the context of higher education community engagement, epistemic injustice leads to the oppression of community knowledge, which is not recognized or valued in the expert paradigm. To achieve epistemic justice in higher education community engagement, there needs to be an intentional commitment to engaging community knowledge and co-creating knowledge and meaning. Bringing community knowledge into the classroom involves a shift in pedagogy such that knowledge expertise is shared and community knowledge is brought forth from community partners and students. The knowledge of everyone in the classroom space contributes to collective learning.

Power

Ensuring that power is shared between higher education and community stakeholders in partnerships is critical to democratic community engagement. Simpson (2014) identifies different ways that power factors into community-campus partnerships, including the social, economic, and political contexts; organizational structures, policies, and cultures; and the historical and current relationships between campuses and communities. Simpson argues that:

> Change efforts that do not explicitly attend to unjust systems will generally align with a liberal focus on attitudes and beliefs and will serve to recenter and privilege those already in power… efforts directed towards change that overlook power may offer surface-level alterations to a specific issue but will fail to bring about lasting transformation (p. 73).

Ignoring the role and impact of power in community engagement has contributed to what Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton (2009) characterize as a stalled movement. The higher education community engagement movement has grown to include more activities and programs on college campuses; however, the prevailing structures, policies, and cultures stem from the dominant epistemology of university as an expert have not been transformed. PBCE, with its emphasis on long-term commitments to specific geographical places, centering community impact, and shifting from individual projects (activities and programs) to a full university commitment (process), can be a force for jumpstarting the higher education community engagement movement. Place-based pedagogy, as a counter-normative pedagogy that places equal value on

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student learning and community outcomes and challenges students to consider their interconnectedness with the place they inhabit, is an essential component of the success of PBCE. This interconnectedness requires the consideration of relationships and power. Place-based pedagogy contributes to higher education's responsibility to the public good by challenging students and faculty to "work from the assumption that to be human is to be embedded, practice a willingness to critically analyze one's location, and routinely inhabit the demands and pleasures of a 'we'" (Simpson, 2012, p. 212).

Research Methods

The research questions that guided the dissertation study were:

1. How do campus-community partnership stakeholders define impact, and what types/forms of impact do they value?
    a. In community-campus partnerships, who has a voice in defining impact?
    b. Who is accountable for ensuring that community impact is achieved?
    c. What elements of community-campus partnerships contribute to impact?
    d. How do contextual factors such as historical relations, racial and socioeconomic differences, and organizational supports and policies influence or inform how stakeholders understand and experience impact?
    e. What negative impacts have emanated from community-campus partnerships, and what were the implications?
2. In what ways do the similarities and differences between how campus and community partners define, measure, and understand impact contribute to our theoretical understanding of how campus-community partnerships and engagement activities can be designed to achieve positive community benefit?

Constructivist grounded theory was chosen for this study because it accounts for the varied contexts in which campus-community partnerships are often situated and focuses on participants' experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints. Further, constructivist grounded theory recognizes the researcher and research participants as co-constructing the theory (Charmaz, 2014). The intent of grounded theory to "move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory" (Creswell, 2013, p.83), along with its focus on individuals, processes, interactions, and relationships, made it an ideal approach for studying the dynamic phenomenon of community engagement.

Data Sources

Data collection methods included document analysis, a survey, and semi-structured interviews. Initial sampling was based on criteria that reflected where the phenomenon of interest was most likely to be observed.

Site and Participant Selection

Ideal participants in grounded theory studies are those who are "experts in the experience" and "representative of the experience" (p. 230). These characteristics of grounded theory informed the selection of sites and interview participants. Study participants were individuals involved with campus-community partnerships active at two, four-year, urban, Jesuit universities in the United States. The purpose of focusing on Jesuit colleges and universities was multi-fold. They share a common mission that emphasizes academic excellence and the formation of "men and women for and with others;" all 27 campuses, referred to collectively as the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, have service-learning programs, and more than half hold the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (CCEC).

To select from among the 27 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities, several criteria were applied: 1) having received the CCEC in 2010 or reclassification in 2015; 2) the size and structure of their community engagement centers, prioritizing those with three or more full-time staff; 3) evidence that community impact is prioritized based on models employed (e.g., PBCE) and mission statements; and their general Carnegie Classification, eliminating those classified as higher or highest research.

The two universities selected are referred to in the study as Kolvenbach University (KU) and Ellacuria University (EU), after two prominent Jesuits who have influenced contemporary understandings and manifestations of the social justice mission of Jesuit higher education. Both are mid-sized, predominately White urban Jesuit Catholic universities. Both have well-established community engagement centers with a staff of ten or more and facilitate a range of programs, including PBCE, service-learning, student leadership, service immersions, and social justice advocacy. EU's PBCE initiative is described as "an intentional, systematic, and transformative university-community initiative that will achieve community-identified outcomes supporting children, youth, and families in the [community] through student learning, research, and teaching consistent with [EU's] Mission and Vision." The mission of KU's PBCE initiative is to "collaborate with neighbors and partners to produce positive change for all residents in the community that improves the area education and youth development, builds civic capacity and strengthens the [Community's] commercial corridor." Study participants included KU and EU faculty and staff and community partner representatives involved in active community-campus partnerships that had been in place for a minimum of two years. Consistent with grounded theory, experience rather than demographic representation drove sampling. There were 25

participants overall, 13 at EU (including seven community partners and six faculty/staff) and 12 at KU (including six community partners and six faculty/staff).

Document Analysis

The first data collection phase focused on document analysis which provided insight into the context in which community engagement and campus-community partnerships were situated. The artifacts included the CCEC applications, websites and mission statements, annual reports, documents describing partnership activities, and university promotion and tenure policies. Documents were reviewed before each site visit and referred back to them several times during data analysis to help deepen the researcher's understanding of the contexts in which community-campus partnerships operated.

Surveys

Before the interviews, participants completed a brief online survey. Responses helped inform the semi-structured interview protocol and provided insight into the community-campus partnership practices being employed and how participants perceived the benefits of the partnership.

Site Visits and Interviews

A total of three site visits were made: two to EU and one to KU. During the site visits, observation opportunities included staff meetings, a campus-community book club meeting, and a community walking tour. Semi-structured interviews conducted during the site visits were the primary source of data. Interview questions focused on partnership processes, roles and responsibilities, sense of power, and how participants defined, understood, and valued impact. During the second visit to EU, follow-up interviews were held with 6 participants to explore emerging themes and gain feedback on how the themes resonated with participants.

Data Analysis

NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to code and analyze data, including interview transcripts, interview notes and memos, and open-ended survey responses. An iterative coding process was employed by close-coding the first eight interviews, analyzing data for themes, merging codes to capture the phenomenon's essence best, and dropping codes that did not hold up. This process was repeated, leading to the identification of 30 codes. From these codes, nine themes emerged as particularly salient: 1) lack of mutual accountability; 2) risk and resilience; 3) relationship as a facilitator of impact; 4) repairing and rebuilding trust; 5) access and inclusion;

6) power dynamics; 7) relationship as impact; 8) challenges defining and measuring impact; 9) engaging community knowledge.

Findings

Community and campus partners described impact in terms of broad purposes rather than specific outcomes and emphasized narrative, context, and process as opposed to quantifiable measures. They identified challenges to achieving impact as well as their vision for what could be. Together, the themes created a core storyline of subversion – that a primary goal of community-campus partnerships is to subvert the socio-historical relationship between campus and communities by disrupting the dominant narrative, one characterized by power, distrust, and exclusion, and to construct a new one characterized by mutual respect, valuing community knowledge, trusting relationships, and marshaling power for change. This reflects the values of place-based community engagement - to shift engagement from isolated actions to a university-wide strategy, to understand and engage a local context, to center community knowledge, and place equal importance on community and university impact – which, in turn, has implications for place-based pedagogy (Yakamura & Koth, 2018).

Lack of Mutual Accountability

Among the challenges of achieving positive community impact that participants described was a mutually exclusive approach to identifying and tracking outcomes. In other words, desired outcomes for partnership activities existed, but rather than being mutual, they were often mutually exclusive, with some focused on student learning and others on community outcomes. Community partners understood their goals but had no knowledge of student learning outcomes, and vice versa; faculty were aware of student learning outcomes but not community goals. At the end of the project, there was often no follow-up communication where partners discussed progress toward their respective goals. Kamal, a community partner, said:

> We have outcomes for our programs. We want to bring in people and get
> them exposure and match them up with mentors, and then they have theirs.
> I'm sure they want their students to get community service and to better
> understand the community and build those relationships, but coming up
> with those things together, I think, is something that we could probably do
> a better job at.

A contrast to the lack of mutual accountability that surfaced in the data were efforts and aspirations to shift pedagogy and design courses with community impact as the starting point. Long-term partnerships, strategic course design, and connections to research were key factors in

supporting this shift. For example, one faculty member described looking at the lifespan of a multi-year project with a community partner and designing courses and assignments based on the early (research), mid-term (grant-writing), and longer-term (resource development) needs of the project. E'Rika, a community partner, described the cumulative impact of community-engaged learning courses over time: "We have grown the home libraries of our youth and provided them with over 25,000 books, backpacks, and supplies. We increased student motivation towards reading [and] increased interest in going to college."

Faculty discussed the importance of connecting research with teaching as a strategy for sustaining partnerships and a means for a deeper understanding of community needs to align course design and student learning outcomes better to meet those needs. In response to a survey question asking what is necessary to enhance community impact, a community-engagement professional said, "the university needs to look at curricular commitments…one- to two- year commitments, supervised by faculty or staff, that are created together with the community partner. Community engagement needs to be part of a broader curriculum, not an individual class." Indeed, this is consistent with how Yakamura and Koth (2018) distinguish place-based pedagogy from service learning, saying, "place-based community engagement moves service-learning from isolated individual actions to an institution-wide strategy embracing long-term reciprocal community partnerships" (p. 12).

Risk

Another challenge to achieving a positive impact on community goals and student learning was an unwillingness to take risks. Community and university stakeholders acknowledged that they often shy away from learning experiences with the potential for greater impact because the trust is not there. For example, Julie, a community partner, reflected:

> I don't often give students full autonomy over anything important… Yeah, it's a trust issue, and it's a student bandwidth issue, and my bandwidth to be able to facilitate all the time. So, if it's not going to be a successful unless it's done on my timeline, and not when your teacher says that you should have your project done by, I will tend to veer away from those.

Likewise, faculty were looking for community partners to "put more skin in the game" and to be more open to planning experiences that better align student skills and learning outcomes with community needs, which sometimes requires moving beyond the scope of set programming that volunteers are slotted into.

Community partners conveyed a correlation between levels of trust, risk, and impact, indicating a willingness to take greater risks – meaning invest more time, collaborate on more important

projects, share more power, etc. – when they trusted that their university partners were centering community needs and outcomes. Collaborations that are riskier, in this sense, are likely to have a more meaningful impact on student learning as well as community outcomes.

The absence of trust often leads partners to default to plugging students into pre-existing volunteer programs instead of a more thoughtful co-planning or co-designing of learning experiences that could benefit students and the community. Place-based pedagogy emphasizes a long-term commitment to a defined geographic place and is conducive to building the trust needed to support impactful collaborations.

Relationship as a Facilitator of Impact

Relationship was an important theme that showed up in two ways – as a facilitator of impact and as an impact in and of itself. The interaction between relationships and other themes brought nuance to how relationships showed up as necessary.

Repairing and Rebuilding Trust

When talking with community partners about defining impact, many discussed the importance of presence and developing trusting relationships. For example, many of KU's community partners mentioned the importance of KU's consistent presence within the community. Attention to relationship building was essential to overcoming distrust between both campuses and their communities. Rodney, a community center director and life-long member of the community shared by EU, said, "I think it takes time and, you know…, there's trust that needs to be rebuilt. Sometimes you can't just jump all in, right, until those things happen." Shah (2020) refers to this relational aspect of community engagement as "building a stronger relational environment for knowledge exchange" (p. 58). To create the conditions for impactful knowledge exchange through place-based pedagogy, it may be necessary to initially decenter student learning to make room for listening, understanding, and centering community impact. A KU community-engagement professional, for example, described a year-long listening period during which she intentionally did not enter community conversations looking for teaching, learning, and research opportunities but rather entered with a complete openness to listening, learning from the community, and building trusting relationships. Relationship and trust-building strategies used by the campuses in this study included listening projects, learning community history, creating leadership- and decision-making roles for community partners on university committees, and bringing greater balance between the prioritization of community needs and academic structures and practices.

Access and Inclusion

The value community partners placed on having access to the university was present in nearly all interviews with community partners. They were interested in professional development for themselves, and many talked about the importance of exposing young people in the community to campus life. They appreciated opportunities to bring youth to campus and wanted more. They also described times when they and their youth were questioned or made to feel suspect on campus. Community partners expressed a desire to impact change on campus in hopes that it would benefit their young people.

Practical ways to facilitate access through place-based pedagogy could be to open relevant courses and campus-based professional development to community partners; compensate community partners as co-educators and provide them access to university resources such as the library or recreational facilities; and engage with the community on campus, as opposed to always thinking that engagement needs to happen in the community.

Power Dynamics

Sam, a community partner, shared the following reflection on how power and privilege manifest in campus-community engagement:

> An element of privilege that does not get analyzed is the privilege to come and go. To be in a long-term relationship with the community, the university needs to care that people are dying on the streets in a paramount way.

The fact that communities operate on time frames that transcend university calendars and short-term community engagement is limited in the scope of impact are widely recognized challenges within higher education community engagement. These differences are often discussed as logistical hurdles that hinder achieving impact. However, Sam's comment reflects something much deeper than a logistical hurdle. In their framing of the choice to engage as a privilege with life and death implications, Sam identifies an ontological divergence in how communities and universities understand their sense of belonging and responsibility to one another. Sam believed that if colleges and universities operated as part of the community – such that the community's well-being was tied to that of the university – and applied their resources and power to working alongside community members to solve community problems, change could occur.

The sharing of power through place-based pedagogy can start small, for example, by inviting community partners to co-design a course or intentionally trying to center community outcomes and align student learning outcomes to them. The sharing of power can also be enacted through

broader place-based pedagogical strategies that move beyond singular courses toward curricular alignment – within departments or even across schools – that partners its resources for the betterment of the community. As Simpson (2014) writes:

> In sum, curriculum is a central departmental resource when considering higher education's obligations to public life and the primary response in regard to the aims and consequences of undergraduate education. Curriculum is the avenue through which structural bodies such as departments demonstrate their commitments to the questions of the "we."
> (p. 226)

Relationship as Impact

In addition to being a vital stepping-stone and facilitator of positive impact, higher education and community partners saw relationships as the impact they were ultimately seeking.

Challenges Defining and Measuring Impact

When posed with the question, "how do you define impact?" nearly all community partners defaulted to tracking quantitative data. Yet, community partners also lamented that quantitative measures do not tell the story of what is changing due to their work. This is reflected in E'Rika's comment, "So, understanding that, when there's layers of trauma, you can't get caught up in the quantitative. I like to have quality, and I think that looking at the changing narrative that helps to give you that quality." The importance and value of qualitative storytelling had resonance with community and campus partners. Place-based pedagogical strategies could include developing courses focused on the art of storytelling and qualitative research that could help community partners better communicate the impact of their work.

Engaging Community Knowledge

The ideal impact described by many community partners was a transformed relationship between higher education and the community, such that colleges and universities recognize their place, roles, and responsibilities as part of the community rather than apart from it. Community partners characterized this transformed relationship as one in which campus partners see the community for its strengths and "appreciate their chance to be a part of our community," one that involves the whole university rather than a single entity, like a community engagement center; and one that leads to more permeable boundaries such that the community begins to see itself reflected on the campus. Higher education partners also expressed interest in a new narrative, one in which the university recognized the importance of the work and put resources behind it, one where

faculty, staff, and students were more involved in the life of the community and not confined by academic calendars and traditional measures of success and impact; and one where the full university invested in community engagement, not just centers. Community and higher education partners alike talked about marshaling their collective power for change – change in the community and change in higher education.

PBCE has great promise for facilitating this transformed relationship described by community partners. PBCE's focus on a geographically defined place, often a neighborhood as opposed to an entire city, can facilitate a sustained immersion of faculty, students, and staff in that place and, vice versa, to invite residents to be a part of the campus. Many campuses employing PBCE are located in or immediately next to the communities where their efforts are focused. As part of their PBCE initiatives, some campuses build infrastructure, offices, or even campuses to facilitate their sustained presence in the communities to which they are committed. An intentional geographic focus can potentially concentrate resources and unite the entire campus in the study of a place. EU, for example, had numerous projects aimed toward understanding and telling the history of their place, illuminating past injustices to inform a path toward more just relationships.

Constructivist Grounded Theory: The Justice-Centering Relationship Framework

The themes that emerged from the data, particularly community partner voices, led to the development of the Justice-Centering Relationships Framework (see Figure 1). Using the sensitizing concepts – partnership characteristics and practices, power, and epistemology – to organize and analyze the data, two distinct paradigms for understanding community impact in higher education community engagement were identified as Plug-and-Play and Justice-Centering Relationships that are bridged by a process referred to as *reframing*.
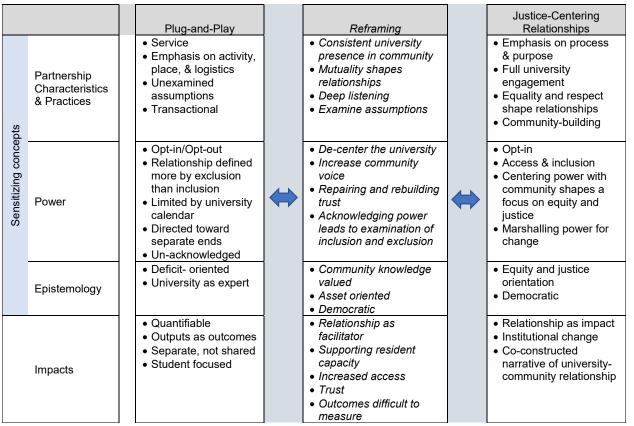
	Plug-and-Play	Reframing	Justice-Centering Relationships
Partnership Characteristics & Practices	• Service • Emphasis on activity, place, & logistics • Unexamined assumptions • Transactional	• *Consistent university presence in community* • *Mutuality shapes relationships* • *Deep listening* • *Examine assumptions*	• Emphasis on process & purpose • Full university engagement • Equality and respect shape relationships • Community-building
Power	• Opt-in/Opt-out • Relationship defined more by exclusion than inclusion • Limited by university calendar • Directed toward separate ends • Un-acknowledged	• *De-center the university* • *Increase community voice* • *Repairing and rebuilding trust* • *Acknowledging power leads to examination of inclusion and exclusion*	• Opt-in • Access & inclusion • Centering power with community shapes a focus on equity and justice • Marshalling power for change
Epistemology	• Deficit- oriented • University as expert	• *Community knowledge valued* • *Asset oriented* • *Democratic*	• Equity and justice orientation • Democratic
Impacts	• Quantifiable • Outputs as outcomes • Separate, not shared • Student focused	• *Relationship as facilitator* • *Supporting resident capacity* • *Increased access* • *Trust* • *Outcomes difficult to measure*	• Relationship as impact • Institutional change • Co-constructed narrative of university-community relationship

(Left vertical label: Sensitizing concepts)

FIGURE 1. Justice-centering relationships framework.

A critical difference between the framework's paradigms is campus and community relationships. In the Plug-and-Play paradigm, campus-community partnerships function as individual units. The impact is focused on, defined as, and limited by individual behaviors and commitments and short-term, quantifiable outputs. Within this paradigm, the university is seen as separate from the community, and its investment in and commitment to the community is minimal. In the Justice-Centering Relationships paradigm, campus-community partnerships are understood as part of a broader institutional commitment and collective effort. Impacts are longer-term and defined as ever-evolving relationships that contribute to institutional and social change. The university recognizes its position as part of the community within this paradigm. Through the process of *reframing*, institutions can begin to change and create the conditions for justice-centering relationships.

The Justice-Centering Relationships Framework depicts a broader understanding of how issues like power and dominant beliefs about how knowledge is generated and who has the capacity to generate knowledge (epistemology) influence community engagement practices that often fall short of generating the positive community benefit that we imagine and desire. The framework also highlights ways that higher education and community partners can shift practice and change

systems to achieve transformative relationships that lead to positive community impact and more substantial student learning and formation.

The Framework contributes to the field of higher education community engagement by addressing the "how" of integrating change across the varied dimensions of the system that community-campus partnerships operate within to center and achieve positive community impact. Key to this change is acknowledging how dominant epistemologies and arrangements of power center the focus of positive impact on students and university outcomes and inhibit the possibilities of achieving just outcomes for the community.

Service learning, an experiential approach to teaching and learning that links academic study and community-engaged work so that each is strengthened and both are transformed, has been referred to as a movement. Swords and Kiely (2010) describe a "movement-building approach to service learning" as one that moves "beyond pedagogical innovation" to a "more robust approach including pedagogy, research, organizational learning, and community development" (p. 148).

The Justice-Centering Relationships Framework could help inform what a movement-building place-based pedagogy could look like – one that transcends individuals and individual courses and partnerships to include a full institutional strategy and commitment characterized by a hyper-local focus, the centering of relationships and community outcomes, attention to the dynamics of power, and striving for inclusion and equity. Using the Framework as a guide, practitioners can move their community-engaged work from the Plug-and-Play frame to the Justice-Centering Frame.

Implications for Place-Based Pedagogy

Although this study's primary purpose was to better understand community impact on higher education community engagement, the findings point to the intricate link between community and student learning outcomes. Giving more attention to enhancing community outcomes will lead to a positive impact on student learning. For example, the link between trust and risk-taking findings suggests that building trust in community-campus partnerships may lead to the development of higher-stakes projects, which, in turn, are linked to higher-impact learning experiences and community outcomes. Additionally, educators can improve practice at the level of individual partnerships and courses by developing a practice of building conversations about impact at the start of community engagement. Engaging in discussions with community partners about their goals and how they define impact will likely lead to new opportunities and ways of working with community partners. These conversations will also lead to meaningful learning outcomes for students that will reflect and be directly linked to community outcomes. As Murray (2020) asserts:

> Emphasizing community outcomes as learning objectives for students is
> one of the more innovative ways to maximize both simultaneously. And
> while this is definitely stepping "outside the box" of normative teaching, it
> also begins to teach students that… they themselves have a real stake in
> what is best for the community.

Further, as referenced earlier in this article, by incorporating community knowledge, educators can expand the expertise, experience, and overall knowledge resources that can inform student learning (Cruz, 2017).

The ideals of PBCE cannot be achieved if practice remains located in the Plug-and-Play paradigm. To realize the full potential of PBCE requires moving toward the Justice-Centering Relationships paradigm. The Framework can serve as a guide and resource for how to shift practice, relationships, and pedagogy, moving from individual initiatives to full university engagement. Drawing on the Justice-Centering Relationships paradigm can lead to systems changes that create better conditions for impactful community and student learning outcomes. As Murray (2020) points out:

> Animating the mission through place-based learning means that it cannot
> be confined to a singular class or project, but that it must become a part of
> the fabric of the university itself, ideally offering students opportunities
> for research, volunteerism, co-curricular projects, and service learning.

Placed-based and other collective impact and systemic approaches to community engagement can create pathways for students, beyond singular experiences, to grow their capacity to be agents of change. Systemic change can feel overwhelming, but participants in this study demonstrated ways to chip away at change by dismantling structures and/or practices that serve as barriers to justice-centering community engagement (Tuck, 2018) and "experimenting in the ideal," as Cruz (2017) encourages, to see what works.

Conclusion

To achieve the democratic aims of higher education and fulfill its obligation to the public good will require colleges and universities to, as Simpson (2014) states, "inhabit ethical, ontological, and epistemological frameworks that acknowledge our relational embeddedness, the significance of power, the inevitability of interests and consequences, and the importance of justice (p. 207)." A place-based pedagogical movement that transcends individuals and individual courses and partnerships to include a full institutional strategy and commitment characterized by a hyper-local focus, the centering of relationships and community outcomes, attention to the dynamics of power, and striving for inclusion and equity has great promise for helping higher education meet

its obligation to the public good. The Justice-Centering Relationships framework, which affirms what many community engagement practitioners and scholars within higher education and the community know from their experience and inquiry that relationships are essential to positive, sustained community impact, can help PBCE practitioners make the necessary shifts in epistemology, practice, pedagogy, and institutional posture to achieve the vision and goals of PBCE.

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