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Serving Ourselves: How the Discourse on Community Engagement Privileges the University over the Community

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Using methods of discourse analysis, I analyzed examples of the word “community” from 25 of the most recent articles in the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning. This analysis uncovered a variety of ways in which the university appears to be privileged over the community in the discourse of higher education community-based engagement. This paper discusses four themes emerging from the analysis that represent this privileging: community as a means by which the university enhances its academic work; community as a recipient of influence by the university; community as a place which the university makes better; and community as a factor in the financial interest of the university. By identifying these subtle yet troubling themes, I aim to inspire more community-focused research as well as to encourage scholars to reflect critically on how their discourses shape an evolving understanding of community-engaged practice.

Since Ernest Boyer (1990) recommended that university scholarship become more engaged, the higher education landscape has been changing. Recognizing the academic, societal, and economic disconnect between themselves and the neighbourhoods in which they are situated, many higher education institutions are turning to campus-community partnerships as one way to address this disconnect (d’Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). This increase in campus-community partnerships results in an increase in research, creating discourse communities that shape and influence understandings of community engagement in higher education. In this context, however, these discourse communities are perhaps counterproductively incestuous, producing scholarship written by and for scholars, and that excludes participation by the very “community” they intend to serve. Considering Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton’s (2008) recent concerns related to why civic engagement in higher education appears to be stalling, one has to ask, is there indeed a privileged epistemology of the academy that runs counter to principles of community engagement? If so, is this privilege being reinforced through a discourse that one would expect to be sympathetic to the voice of the community? To answer this question, I investigate the discourse of community engagement in higher education, and in particular in community service learning, the most popular form of campus-community engagement, and analyze critically how scholars are creating and reinforcing certain understandings in the field.

How are scholars representing the concept of com-

munity in their discourses, especially in light of a noted, and suspicious, absence of community participation in the scholarship of community engagement in higher education? Numerous criticisms concerning the lack of research into the effects of campus-community engagement on communities (Giles & Cruz, 2000; Howard, 2003; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999) substantiate concerns over how “community” is factoring into the literature. For this reason, Stoecker and Tryon (2009) ask, “Who is being served in community service learning?” (p. 5). With this question in mind, I turn toward the discourse of community service learning to investigate more closely how scholars are invoking the concept of community and to what effect. By isolating examples of the term community within the literature, and analyzing them, a clearer picture emerges of how the research is portraying the very group it intends to serve.

Drawing attention to this picture and recycling the findings back into the very literature I analyzed, I intend to raise a critical awareness within the engagement community of how the language connected to the term community creates and reinforces certain understandings. In my effort to understand how the concept of community is being portrayed in the literature, I conducted a discourse analysis (Gee, 2011; Harris, 1952; Hymes, 1964; Paltridge, 2006; Perakyla, 2005; Powers, 2001) of the key word community as used in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. Reflected in this analysis is a discourse that privileges the university over the community. Furthermore, a number of

themes emerge that specifically illustrate the ways in which the discourse creates an understanding of the community as a passive recipient of the university's more active agency in designing and implementing community-based projects. This paper discusses four ways community is conceived in the literature that denote a privileging of the university: community as a means by which the university enhances its academic work; community as a recipient of influence by the university; community as a place which the university makes better; and community as a factor in the financial interest of the university. I highlight these themes to illustrate the subtle yet troubling ways in which community engagement discourse articulates a privileging of the university over the community.

Background

Community

Embedded in the values of community service learning are community-centered ideas related to collaboration, reciprocity, social change, and empowerment (Stoecker, 2003). Despite these community-focused principles, the discourse on community service learning has been criticized for its focus on its value to students rather than its value to communities (Giles & Cruz, 2000; Howard, 2003; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). In spite of this criticism, or perhaps in response to it, recent discourse does appear to be concerned with community-centered issues. For example, an examination of the titles and abstracts of the most recent 25 articles in *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*¹ reflects content areas related to collaboration (Porter, Summers, Toton, & Aisenstein, 2008), reciprocity (d'Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009), social change (Saltmarsh, 2009; Moely, Furco, & Reed, 2008) and community perspective (Tryon, Stoecker, Martin, Seblunka, Higendorf, & Nellis, 2008). Examining titles and abstracts, however, provides only a glimpse into how issues are being represented in the discourse, and a deeper more involved analysis enables one to understand the subtle and nuanced ways in which the discourse constructs meaning for discourse communities. In light of criticism concerning how the community is being left out of the discourse, scholars cannot complacently accept titles, abstracts, and even entire articles as evidence of fairly representing a concept as essential as community. As Stoecker and Tryon point out, disregarding the community perspective in community engagement has the potential "to create dialectical processes that undermine the entire effort of service learning" (p. 7). By deconstructing the very texts that appear to address community perspectives in campus-community engage-

ment, an analysis can provide insights into the tensions that exist between sentence level discourse and larger conceptual understandings of the field. Indeed, discourse analysis allows researchers to delve into the subtle, minute uses of language that influence larger, more global understandings (Roth, 1988). Furthermore, because of our commitment to the field, we need to hold ourselves accountable to the community we intend to serve, scrutinize our discourse, call into question how we position ourselves and the community, and reflect critically on our ability to shape the field of community engagement.

Discourse Analysis

Gaining momentum within the social sciences is the idea that language is more than simply a reflection of reality; it constitutes reality (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Winch, 1958; Wittgenstein, 1967). Social science researchers are becoming less interested in what the social world means to those within it, and more interested in how and why the social world comes to have the meaning it does (Phillips & Hardy). Furthermore, researchers are identifying their position within those social worlds, and becoming interested in the roles they play in constructing meanings within those worlds (Phillips & Hardy). Discourse analysis is one method that allows researchers to investigate these processes, and is wholly appropriate when looking at how discursive agents of any field create and reinforce knowledge of that field.

Broadly defined, discourse analysis refers to the process of examining text, both written and spoken (Gee, 2011; Harris, 1952; Hymes, 1964; Paltridge, 2006; Perakyla, 2005; Powers, 2001). Although originating in the field of linguistics, discourse analysis also refers to different methods of investigating human communication in the humanities and social sciences (Gillen & Petersen, 2005). In a social research context, discourse analysis involves the assumption that language is an inherent part of social life and social research analysis must consider language (Fairclough, 2003). When discourse analysis is grounded in postmodern and poststructural epistemology, as is the case in this study, it involves more than analyzing syntax and semantics; it involves looking at how texts have been constructed in terms of their social and historical context (Cheek, 2004). Analyzing discourse for the purpose of discovering whose interests are being served is a form of social criticism with a long history in the field of linguistics, but its application is growing broadly across other postmodern, social-oriented disciplines (Powers, 2001). When text is analysed to understand how discourse can enact, reproduce, and resist power abuse, dominance, and inequalities in society, it falls under the paradigm of critical discourse analysis (Perakyla;

Powers; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Ehernberger Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, postmodern approaches to discourse analysis explore how issues such as culture, ideology, and identity are both constructed and reflected in texts (Paltridge).

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method of deconstructing text; it is not value-neutral as it focuses on the social features, political ramifications, and power relations inherent in textual bodies of knowledge (Powers, 2001). It allows researchers to deconstruct a text, focusing on its smallest units to determine the subtle ways in which language constructs meaning. Although a more holistic analysis of a text, one in which a variety of features are considered, might render more contextualized results, a more focused sentence-level analysis, like the one undertaken here, allows one to delve deeply into the heart of a text. In doing so, analysts investigate discourse at its most basic level, comparing those results to a more obvious and superficial reading of a text to determine how the core of a text aligns with its broader message. Thus, to understand the ways in which our own discourse community is constructing meaning around the concept of community, as well as how that meaning compares to broader principles within the discourse and the field of community service learning, I used the method of discourse analysis grounded in a postmodern epistemology.

Method

I collected data from the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, a premier journal in the area of campus-community engagement. With an established commitment to deepening the theory, research, and pedagogy related to community-campus engagement, as well as to sustain the intellectual vigor of this field (Howard, n.d.), the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning is clearly the epicenter of discourse in this area, and an obvious place from which to draw data. I used the 25 articles from the most recent five issues (Spring, 2008-Spring, 2010) available on the journal's online website. (It is this Journal's policy to embargo on this website the most recent issues for one year; therefore, I was unable to access articles from Fall, 2010 or Spring, 2011). Drawing on these 25 articles provided two and one-half years of recent research comprised of approximately 400 pages. Because of a high incidence of the word community (searches in some articles rendered 130 hits), I chose a random selection of 10 examples from each of the 25 articles, making up a sample of 250 sentence-level excerpts of the word community. It should be noted that embedded within these 25 articles is the existence of an even greater domain of discourse, including a total of 50 external reviewers and all of the journal's readers.

In light of this grander domain, it becomes clear that the discourse cannot be isolated from the nature of its audience; rather it is characteristic of the audience it reaches (Roth & Pei Ling, 2008). For this reason, I viewed the 25 articles as representing a strong sample of the most current domain of discourse within the field of community service learning.

Using an open-coding approach (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I analyzed the excerpts, forming initial categories based on how the word community was represented. I began to notice properties emerging out of each excerpt, and noted these. I then organized these into subcategories, and continued to review the excerpts. Consistently reviewing the data, I began to notice themes emerging. I continued to read and reread the excerpts, looking for similarities among excerpts, and ultimately grouping similar themes together. An example of the process of coding can be illustrated through the following excerpt:

Service learning is a form of experiential education that asks students "to test the merit of what they learn in the university classroom against their experiences" (Chisholm, 2000, p. 330) in the community.

Initially this excerpt was coded as *community as a place*. When I later returned to this example, I paid closer attention to what was happening in that place and by whom. I, therefore, re-coded this excerpt as *community as a place where students go to test the merit of classroom knowledge*. Finally, this excerpt was coded as *community as a means by which the university enhances its academic work*. This final theme was coded on, or consistent with, 34 out of 250 excerpts (14%), and included as one of 12 sub-themes under the larger category of *university as privileged agent in community-based engagement*.

When I perceived that a saturation point had been reached, I reviewed my themes, grouping them into four categories: (a) themes that illustrated the community as an equal partner in community-based engagement; (b) themes that illustrated the university as privileged agent in community-based engagement; (c) themes that illustrated the community as privileged agent in community-based engagement; and (d) themes that illustrated a neutrality in regards to the agent being privileged. In this paper, I discuss the second theme: university as privileged agent in community-based engagement.

Limitations

Before delving into the findings, it is important to share the limitations of this study. One limitation is analyst bias; the analysis was undertaken by only one person. All results and discussion, therefore, are

based on my interpretation of, and interaction with, the data. This interaction is invariably affected by my own experiences, biases, and views. I fully acknowledge that another analyst might have coded the data differently, or sought to organize and disseminate results differently. For example, I have chosen here to discuss only four subthemes that illustrate the theme of *university as agent*. However, 41 excerpts (16%) were coded under the theme of *community and university as equal agents*. Another analyst may have been interested in discussing these results as they would perhaps illustrate a more reciprocal balance between the university and the community, and therefore align more closely with the principles of community-based engagement in higher education. Instead, I have chosen to highlight the more problematic and troubling nature of my findings to draw attention to and raise awareness of a subtle, yet problematic privileging in the discourse. Also, this study derived its data from only 25 articles from only one journal. A larger sample size, drawing from a number of sources, might render different results even if analyzed by the same researcher.

Findings

In the discourse, the university and its partners are positioned differentially. More often than not the university-based subject is the agent and the community is the recipient of action. Indeed, nearly 146 out of 250 excerpts (58%) analyzed in this study were coded as subthemes under the category *university as the active agent in community-based engagement*. On the other hand, the community is represented as active agents in only 13 (5%) of the excerpts. Reciprocity and collaboration, which represent an effort toward an equal relationship, were also represented in the discourse, with the community and university represented as equal agents in 41 (16%) of the excerpts. Finally, the remaining 50 (20%) excerpts were neutral in regards to who was the active agent.²

In positioning the university as the active agent in community-based engagement, the discourse illustrates that the university enjoys a position of relative control in community-based initiatives, resulting in a community whose role is to adapt to the university's initiatives. Furthermore, the university's initiatives appear, from this analysis, connected to its own academic and financial interests. To illustrate how the discourse positions the university above the community, I highlight four of 12 subthemes relevant to this category of university as the active agent: (a) community as a means by which the university enhances its academic work; (b) community as a recipient of influence by the university; (c) community as a place which the university makes better; and (d) community as a factor in the financial interest of the university.

Community as a means by which Universities Enhance their Academic Work

One way in which the discourse privileges the university over the community, and represents the university as active agent in campus-community engagement, is exemplified in the use of the term community to signify a means by which the university engages to further its own academic goals. Coded on 34 of the total 250 (14%) examples of the word community, this theme is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Service-learning is designed to provide credit bearing educational experiences for students to actively address community needs while reflecting on their service activity to further their understanding of course content (Hughes, Welsh, Mayer, Boyer & Southard, 2009, p. 69).

Although this example acknowledges that community needs are addressed in service-learning, it also states that those needs are addressed by students, not the community itself. This sentence-level example also suggests that community service learning is designed for students, not the community, as a credit-bearing educational experience. In addition, the service activity is used for reflection, a practice that furthers the students' understanding of course content. From this example, courses are designed for students to address community needs and provide credit-bearing educational experiences to encourage reflection that furthers students' understandings. Indeed, this example illustrates the university as an active agent in the design of community-based projects intended to further the academic learning of its students.

Another example illustrating how the discourse signifies the community as a means by which universities further their own academic goals is seen in the following excerpt:

Using those 5 C's as a framework, the authors examine student success at satisfying those disciplinary standards through community service learning (CSL) (Lear & Abbot, 2008, p. 76).

Here the discourse admits that it is measuring student success at satisfying disciplinary standards by engaging with the community. Again, community is represented as a means through which student success is determined, and in this case, measured. To the university, its students, and Lear and Abbot, disciplinary standards are potentially satisfied through engaging with the community. In this way, students are the active agents, engaging with the community to satisfy disciplinary standards.

And one more example that illustrates how the dis-

course represents the community as a means by which the university accomplishes its academic goals is seen here:

Students in SL sections spent at least three hours outside the classroom per week (30 hours per semester) immersed at a community service site where they were exposed to issues complementing those they were learning about in the classroom (Bernacki & Jaegar, 2008, p. 8).

Once again, the discourse reflects student-centeredness. Here the students are immersed in a community environment to gain exposure to issues complementing what they are doing in the classroom. In all of these examples, we see the discourse invoking community in such a way that represents the university, its faculty, and its students as privileged agents, the beneficiaries of community service learning experiences. These examples illustrate only one way in which the university is participating as active agent and community as recipient of action. Another sub-theme in this category involves how the community-based projects are controlled or influenced by the university.

Community as Influenced by the University

Another way in which the university is privileged as active agent in the discourse of community-based engagement is seen through excerpts illustrating the university having more instrumental power in designing community-based projects. In this analysis, 24 examples of the total 250 (10%) were coded according to this theme. The following excerpt illustrates this subtheme:

Working with a local organization, students were expected to assess specific needs of their community (either campus or home) and enact a response to those needs that tended toward change rather than charity (James & Iverson, 2009, p. 35).

In this example, the university, represented by its students, is given the control to assess specific needs of the community. The students, not the community, are given the ownership to “assess” community needs. Furthermore, the students then “enact a response” related to change. As can be seen through the use of the possessive pronoun “their,” and through the content of the overall statement, students are clearly in control of the service-learning project, active agents to the more passive community recipients.

Another example from the discourse illustrating how universities demonstrate a privileged level of control over community-university projects is seen in the context of the “lessons learned” section of an article discussing community-based participatory research:

The choice of community partner influences the

success of the project (Puma, Bennet, Cutforth, Tombari, & Stein, 2009, p. 45).

Although the authors are advocating for partnerships that provide “fruitful outcomes that benefit both partners” (p. 45), the ultimate control over the choice of that community partner lies with the university. From this example, it is obvious that the community partner does not have the choice, but rather the university chooses the community partner, and that will influence potential success of the community-based project. Again, the discourse subtly acknowledges that to have successful partnerships, one side—the university—needs to carefully consider with whom they choose to work.

A final example of how the discourse privileges the role of the university in controlling service-learning partnerships is seen in an article discussing large-scale service-learning projects. In this example, the authors offer the following recommendation for “large scale, multi-partner, multi-site, remote service projects”:

To increase community partner commitment to projects, local community goals must align with the goal of the initiative (Poindexter, Arnold, & Ostenhout, 2009, p. 65).

Once again the discourse reflects a sense that the university has more active control in designing partnership projects than the community with which they partner. In this example, the discourse recommends that to increase community partner commitments, local goals must align with the goal of the initiative. The goal of the initiative appears to be constructed by the university. If university project designers are interested in increasing community partner commitments, they must either choose organizations whose goals are in alignment with the initiative, or the local goals “must” be changed to achieve alignment. Either way, the community goals appear to be subservient to the greater goals of the initiative set by the university.

Community as a Place which the University Makes Better

A number of the examples from the discourse illustrate how authors use community to denote a place where the university goes to make change. Many of these examples again illustrate how the university is the active agent in community engagement, bringing about change and making life better for communities. This subtheme was coded on 24 excerpts out of the 250 total (10%). An example of this subtheme can be seen here:

It seemed our presence had affirmed her community’s very existence, precipitated community-level organizing, and confirmed her right to hope for a better life (Crabtree, 2008, p. 30).

In this example, the university is indicated by the possessive pronoun “our.” This “our” signifies how the author of the discourse is also a member of the university community engaged in community service learning. This example illustrates how the writer, and the university, had the power to affirm a community’s existence by their very presence. To affirm one’s existence by your presence alone is indeed powerful. Furthermore, the university had the power to confirm “her” (the community’s) right to hope for a better life. This example illustrates clearly how the discourse situates the powerful and active role of the university in community-based engagement. According to the discourse, without the university agent, a community might not exist or have any hope for a better life.

Another example that illustrates community as a place potentially improved upon by the university is seen here:

On the one hand, we need not apologize for our particular skills and expertise, without which service learning would have no point; on the other hand, the university is not simply a source of wisdom but a nexus of interchange, an activity with the potential to transform both the institution and the community (Sawyer, 2008, p. 69).

Here we see community depicted as a site for potential transformation, with the university transforming it. Clearly reflected in the language of this example is the understanding that the university is a source of wisdom and a nexus of interchange, possessing the power to potentially transform both itself and the community. Again, the university, and in this case the author who clearly aligns himself as an agent of the university through the use of the possessive “our,” is portrayed as a powerful and necessary active agent in changing the community.

Community as a Factor in the Financial Interest of the University

A smaller subtheme, coded on four of the 250 total examples (2%), involves the community being considered a factor in the financial interests of the university. Although only a small subtheme, this idea that the university is pursuing, or not pursuing community engagement because of economic and accountability issues is of importance even if it were only found once. The following example shows this attention to finances by connecting community-based involvement with campus accountability:

After all, the university is accountable to the tuition paying-student who, on spring break might complain to his/her parents that s/he is learning from an undocumented immigrant, an inmate, or a homeless individual out in the community,

rather than a PhD faculty member in a classroom (D’arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009, p. 15).

From this example, we see the community as a place connected to the financial self-interests of the university. Using the phrase, “after all,” reminds the reader that ultimately the university is accountable not just to its students, but to its “tuition paying-students.” Furthermore, embedded in this excerpt is the fear that such a tuition paying student might complain to his/her parents, the real stakeholders in this equation, that tuition is being paid for learning not from qualified professionals but from homeless individuals or undocumented immigrants. This example illustrates the issue of economic accountability, and how this accountability is used, “after all,” to depict the potential perils of community service learning. The university is once again privileged over the community; the privileging here, however, is shrouded in the subtle reference to the tuition-paying student and the university’s accountability to such a student, rather than to the community. Here, opting out of the community, rather than opting in, may be preferential to the university and its interests.

Discussion

Advocates of campus-community engagement suggest a need for knowledge to be co-created *with*, rather than *for* the community (d’Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009). However, the above examples illustrate how community-based projects appear to be creating knowledge both *with* the community but also *for* the university. Driven by course-based academic goals, a desire to influence or change communities, and/or financial motives, campus-community engagement is frequently portrayed in terms reflecting a benefit for some aspect of the university. Nonetheless, a survey of the titles from recent articles published in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* highlight areas of inquiry related to social justice, reciprocity, democracy, citizenship, and collaboration, words that could be interpreted as privileging the community over the university. Clearly, scholars situated in this discourse community are investigating with a keen eye the issues and principles relevant to the role of the community in campus-community partnerships. Probing the discourse further, however, uncovers tensions and inconsistencies between the broader principles of community-based engagement and the more nuanced discourse in the field. In effect, these tensions highlight inconsistencies between how the field of community service learning is being understood and constructed through its discursive agents—us.

Indeed, the above analysis highlights the incongruities between how the concept of community is

being treated on the surface as well as how it is treated on a fundamental level within the discourse. For example, although a survey of abstracts and titles demonstrate a focus on concepts such as reciprocity and community voice, examples taken from within those titles, abstracts, and articles reflect a different, inconsistent, and troubling privileging of the university over the community. Given the privileged position this analysis has uncovered, we, the discourse community, must ask ourselves two questions: Are we indeed truly privileging ourselves over the community, not only in the discourse but in our approach to campus-community initiatives; and if so, what are we going to do about it, both in terms of our engagement and our discourse, given this is antithetical to our stated core principles of community voice, collaboration, and reciprocity?

Are We Privileging Ourselves?

A criticism of the style of discourse analysis undertaken in this study is that it deconstructs the text to a point of intense decontextualization. Taking sentence level examples that include the term community and analyzing only that text decontextualizes the discourse to a point where something valuable might be lost in the analysis. However, it is important to analyze our discourse on this most basic level to uncover exactly how we are, in our most fundamental ways, representing ourselves and the community with which we intend to partner. If we scrutinize our discourses and find that we are representing concepts such as community consistently, we can achieve a sense of integrity, an integrity that provides value to the field. However, if we deconstruct our voices and find that there is a tension between what we are claiming to do in our projects, our partnerships, and our research on that engagement, and what we are portraying at a basic discursive level, then we need to address these tensions. And if we uncover that we are privileging ourselves in the discourse, we need to address whether or not we are privileging ourselves in our community partnerships work, too.

The scholarship of community-based engagement has called into question how scholars are representing the community (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999; Ward & Wolf Wendel, 2000). Indeed, Stoecker and Tryon point out that much of the research being undertaken in this field is concerned with student perspectives and outcomes. The dearth of research related to the community has even led Stoecker and Tryon to recently question, "Who is served by service learning?" (p. 1). But this concern about how the community is being treated, both in the field and in the discourse, is not a new development. These very issues were raised over 10 years ago by Vernon and Ward as well as Ward and Wolf-

Wendel, and it appears now is a good time to be raising them again.

By choosing to focus our research on our students' perspectives and outcomes, rather than the community's, we are no doubt privileging ourselves and the university over the community. And when the discourse frequently represents the university as the active agent, and the community as the passive recipient, we validate Stoecker and Tryon's (2009) concerns about who in fact we are serving, not only through community service learning, but through the discourses we create to disseminate findings about community engagement.

What Are We Going to Do?

Raising our awareness of how the discourse community and we, as discursive agents within that community, are subjugating the role of the community and privileging ourselves as active agents is only the first step toward reaching a more equitable balance in community-university engagement. This awareness coupled with heightened critical reflection may encourage scholars and practitioners to undertake a more informed approach to community service learning initiatives, an approach balancing the needs of the community with the needs of the university, and placing the community voice and perspective equally and equitably in the planning, implementation, and assessment of such projects. Acknowledging the power of our own voices may in turn encourage us to acknowledge the power of other voices, and work toward supporting solidarity among those at all levels of privilege (Stoecker & Beckman, 2010).

For those of us committed to community engagement in higher education, a critical awareness of the power we hold to shape understandings within our field is worth little if by our actions, as reflected in our discourse, we continue to privilege the university over the community. Like many others (Stoecker & Beckman, 2009; Stoecker & Tyron, 2009; Vernon & Ward, 1999; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000), I want to encourage the field, not only the discourse community, to find ways to temper the university's position of power. What is so appealing about community service learning, and what often inspires converts to the field from both the university and the community, is this idea that universities and communities can be equal partners in this enterprise. Let us not lose sight of this commitment, so inherently inspiring, by falling into the traditional comfort of hegemonic understandings of the university as a privileged and elitist institution. Instead, let us work toward disrupting that assumption by applying a critical lens to our positions and our discourse and attempting to remain true to the principles of community-based engagement, the principles that inspired us in the first place.

Furthermore, let our research reflect the voice of the community, the needs of the community, and the perspective of the community clearly and for the purpose of maintaining integrity and justice in this field. We need to seek out opportunities where research is more collaborative with the community, and in which the dissemination of results are less concerned with how community service learning helps universities—its students, its professors and its coffers—and more with how community service learning creates equal benefits between and amongst universities and communities. Recommendations to this end will not suffice. We need to do it.

Conclusion

As scholars of community-based engagement in higher education, we are concerned with our students, our research, and our communities. Perhaps inspired by Boyer's (1990) reconceptualization of priorities for the professoriate, we spend our time conceiving of how best to teach, research, and most meaningfully engage with communities. We are drawn to community-based engagement because we are socially conscious members of the academy. Or are we? A shortage of research into community-centered issues, coupled with a discourse portraying community-based engagement as a means by which universities meet their own goals, betrays a privileging of the university over the community that community engagement in higher education has intended to disrupt. If community-based engagement is intended to serve us, then let us make it clear to ourselves, our discourse community, and our partner communities that we are engaging in this pedagogy because of what it does for us and for our students. But if that is not our position, then we will have to adjust our lines of inquiry and our discourse to be sure we are engaging with communities with every effort to partner mutually with, and to the equal benefit of, our communities. Let us not say one thing and do another, as this weakens our voice, the integrity of the field, and the communities with which we partner.

Academic discourse communities are intriguingly insular. Scholarship within these communities is written mostly by scholars for scholars, and in the case of human science research, can antithetically omit discursive participation of the very community members who researchers seek to study. Producers of research, therefore, are positioned with great influence as their research contributes to the understandings of their disciplines. For this reason, it is important for existing members of discourse communities to reflect frequently, and consider how they construct and reinforce social understandings through their discourses. Such consideration is further necessary given how research and publication is tied to the process of aca-

demic promotion, tenure, grants, and awards. Clearly, discourse needs to be scrutinized, and the results of that scrutiny need to be recycled back into the discourse. In doing so, scholars encourage a critical reflection on the process of knowledge construction and draw attention to the ways in which language can shape meaning and understanding, as well as practice, within areas of inquiry. I intend for these findings to open a dialogue amongst researchers and practitioners, and encourage creators of discourse to continually scrutinize their own voice, and in so doing, work toward achieving a truly equitable balance between university and community agency.

This paper seeks to open the eyes of the discourse community to the ways in which we are privileging ourselves as active agents and subjugating our community partners as passive recipients in community-based engagement in higher education. By becoming aware of how we are positioning ourselves, we can begin to critically reflect on our research, our partnerships, and our discursive practices. Furthermore, let us aspire to undertake more research focused on community voice, community perspective, and community outcomes. Finally, this paper encourages scholars of community-based engagement in higher education to identify to themselves, their participants, and their readers exactly who they are intending to serve. Not until we do so can the field enjoy a stronger sense of integrity.

Notes

¹ Vol.16, no.2; Vol.16, no.1; Vol.15, no.2; Vol.15, no.1; Vol.14, no.2.

² Total is not 100% due to rounding off.

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